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RIZ AHMED
I find my lack of Star Wars fandom ... disturbing
metroLIFE

Nayeli Orozco Diaz hugs her five-year-old son Aleyan Orozco following his and his sister Yethali's, 7, first day back at school Thursday, three months after they were booted from classes.
JENNIFER GAUTHIER/METRO

THE RIGHT TO LEARN

Langley family wins right to send kids back to school after immigration ordeal
metroNEWS

VANCOUVER ANIMATORS GO ROGUE

Two theatres give lucky few sneak peek of new Star Wars flick
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RATS!
Vancouver the 'rattiest' city in B.C.: Exterminator
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B.C. interest-free loan to first-time homebuyers offers a lot of risk, few rewards
metroNEWS

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metro NEWS

Your essential daily news

Canada has banned asbestos; read Metro's explainer on what that means for you. **Canada**

Homebuyer loan offers risk for little reward: Economists

TAXPAYER-FUNDED PROGRAM

Experts fear subsidizing first home buys will raise prices

Jen St. Denis
Metro | Vancouver

A new taxpayer-funded program to help first time homebuyers will further inflate Metro Vancouver property prices and increases the risk to both the taxpayer and some homebuyers, according to economists.

"We're telling people we want you to stretch to buy a property. That puts the buyer at risk potentially," said Tom Davidoff, a professor of economics at the University of British Columbia.

Premier Christy Clark announced Dec. 13 that her government will offer interest-free, payment-free loans for the first five years to first-time homebuyers who are pre-approved for an insured high-ratio first mortgage, where the down payment is less than 20 per cent of the home's purchase price.

The program only applies to homes worth up to $750,000. The government will provide a 25-year loan to first-time buyers up to $37,500, or five per cent of the home purchase price. The loan program will cost the government $703 million over the next three years.

At a time when Metro Vancouver home prices have skyrocketed into the multi-millions and the federal government has introduced a series of stricter rules for first-time buyers in an effort to cool overheated markets in Vancouver and Toronto, Clark's approach is odd, said Josh Gottlieb and Tsur Somerville, economists at UBC.

Pumping money into the demand side of Metro Vancouver's already supply-constrained real estate market will push prices higher, especially for condos, said the economists.

The program could encourage more speculation in Vancouver's market, which is already helping to drive prices far beyond the range that local incomes can support.

Somerville described a situation whereby a homebuyer gets the government loan, then sells the property at the five-year mark — before the payments kick in.

People are already stretched from attempting to get into the market as prices rose at nosebleed levels throughout 2015 and 2016. Davidoff wondered "who's left?"

"I think we're probably scraping the bottom of the barrel in 2017," he said.

Gottlieb also believes the program could create more risk for homebuyers:

"You start with mortgage that has interest rate locked in for a few years, then you add in the government's 0 per cent rate for the first five years, you have something you can afford in the short term," he said. "You have not just the regular mortgage risk but this jump up to whatever the interest rates will be in five years."

The program will benefit some first-time homebuyers who would not otherwise be able to afford a down payment, the economists said. But much of the benefit will flow directly from taxpayers to the real estate industry and people who already own property. The Urban Development Institute, a developer lobby group, is an enthusiastic supporter of the policy.

The province has introduced a policy — a 15 per cent tax on foreign buyers — that appears to have slowed the market down somewhat. So why would Clark want to goose the market?

"They're going into an election and they don't want a property market crash," Davidoff said, "which was a real risk going into 2017."

Premier Christy Clark and Rich Coleman, minister responsible for housing, announced a new interest-free loan program for first-time homebuyers in Surrey on Dec. 15. CHRISTY CLARK/TWITTER/CONTRIBUTED

> (The government is) going into an election and they don't want a property market crash, which was a real risk going into 2017.
>
> Tom Davidoff

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Kids celebrate return to school

IMMIGRATION

Decision to pull the siblings reversed after Metro story

David P. Ball
Metro | Vancouver

"Is this for real?" seven-year-old Yethali Orozco asked her mom as she prepared for her first school day in three months. "We are going back?"

Yethali and her brother Aleyan, 5, were finally allowed back into North Otter Elementary School in Langley on Thursday after Metro first broke the family's story.

Although the children are Canadian citizens by birth — and their Mexican parents are in B.C. legally — the Langley School District said they weren't entitled residents after their parents' visa renewal was stalled by a police records check that wasn't translated to English.

Mother Nayeli Orozco Diaz was asked to pull them from class — in front of their friends — Sept. 23 and home-school them.

But the district has now reversed that decision, to the relief of the family.

"All morning she was so happy," the 30-year-old mother, who's trained and cared for horses at Hastings Racecourse since 2007, told Metro via Facebook.

"She felt overwhelmed, and when I left her in the gym with her classmates and teacher she was crying and wanted to go back home.

"It's been too many emotions for her lately."

School district spokesman Ken Hoff explained that staff met with the family "and it has been positive," but that its policy to only allow enrolment from Canadian citizens or permanent residents, not simply catchment area residents as required by the B.C. School Act, will remain in place.

"No policies have been changed," he said in an email, "and the District is working with the family to assist them in the process of processing their documentation in much the same way District staff works with other registering families."

For the president of the Langley Teachers Association, Wendy Cook, the issue shouldn't be seen as finished now that the two children are allowed back.

"This district is supposed to be about inclusive education," she told Metro. "To me that means that every single student should have the opportunity to actually get an education, whether or not that individual is an established citizen, as long as they're a resident here in Canada."

As the school day ended at North Otter Elementary, Metro joined Nayeli to meet her children as they emerged with their peers. Her son Aleyan ran straight to her for a hug, before proudly showing her a gingerbread house he drew on his first day of classes in 12 weeks.

> **This district is supposed to be about inclusive education. To me that means that every single student should have the opportunity to actually get an education.** Wendy Cook

Aleyan Orozco, 5, and sister Yethali, 7, following their first day back at school in Langley on Thursday. JENNIFER GAUTHIER/METRO

School districts 'likely in violation': Lawyer

It's definitely not limited to Langley," said immigration lawyer Laura Best, with Embarkation Law, describing cases of immigrant children being denied B.C. schooling. "It's frustrating as a lawyer to see discrepancies across different school boards."

This week, Metro investigated the cases of three families in three school districts who, for different reasons, found their children denied a public education over parents' immigration status.

According to the B.C. School Act, "A person is entitled to enrol in an educational program provided by the board of a school district if the person is of school age, and is resident in that school district."

An education ministry spokesman said, "eligibility for free public education is based on residence rather than citizenship or immigration status."

Education Minister Mike Bernier refused Metro's repeated interview requests since Tuesday, his office emailing: "All districts must adhere to the School Act in B.C."

Best agreed that the "ministry is absolutely right, its legal interpretation is correct" on enrolment rules. "The Langley school district is likely in violation of the provincial legislation."

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Rat population booming, experts say

RANKINGS

B.C. cities with most pest control calls for rats

1. Vancouver
2. Victoria
3. Burnaby
4. Richmond
5. Surrey

VERMIN

Pest control company catches 15 per day on average

Wanyee Li
Metro | Vancouver

Vancouver has the highest number of rats in B.C., according to a pest control company, and that's no surprise, says one rat expert.

"Generally we find that where there is more construction, more population, older buildings, proximity to food, water, that's where we generally see the most calls," said Trine Butler, service manager for Orkin Canada's Vancouver office.

Vancouver's compost program could also be driving rat numbers up, the pest control manager said.

The pest control company, Orkin Canada, released the top B.C. cities for rats Wednesday based on the number of calls it receives in each municipality.

Rats are flexible and can thrive wherever there are humans, said Kaylee Byers, a UBC researcher with the Vancouver Rat Project

"Really the thing that will drive rat population is human presence," she said.

The project aims to collect samples from rats to keep tabs on population health and the diseases they may be carrying. Rats can carry MRSA, bartonella, and leptospira, all of which are transferable to humans.

Researchers caught their 700th rat Wednesday since they started trapping rats in the Downtown Eastside in July. They catch an average of 15 rats a day, according to Byers.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SURREY

Shots fired in Newton

Stu Neatby
For Metro | Vancouver

Surrey RCMP are investigating a shooting that took place in a Newton residential neighbourhood late Wednesday afternoon.

Police were called to the 7300 block of 125th Street at 4:15 p.m. after reports of shots fired at a vehicle. The suspect, described as 5' 7" tall, with short dark hair, wearing black jacket and dark pants, fled the scene in a silver SUV.

The victim, who was in the driveway of a residence at the time, survived unscathed and also fled.

"It does appear from our initial investigation that it is a targeted incident," said Surrey RCMP Sgt. Alanna Dunlop.

Individuals with information are encouraged to contact Surrey RCMP at 604-599-0502.

ABBOTSFORD

Suspected gangsters hear from Santa

Opting for a tamer tone than previous years, the Abbotsford Police Department has once again sent out a round of Christmas cards to those on its naughty list.

Police Chief Bob Rich's 2012 card, sent to individuals suspected of gang activity, featured an image of Santa Claus in tactical gear brandishing an automatic assault rifle.

The department's new round of Christmas cards also includes a photo of Santa, sans weaponry, with the tagline "If you stop believing in Santa, you get underwear. If you stop believing in yourself, you get nowhere."

STU NEATBY/METRO

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HEALTH

Province next battleground in asbestos fight

Matt Kieltyka
Metro | Vancouver

The British Columbia Federation of Labour says its next battleground against asbestos is in Victoria.

The federation's president, Irene Lanzinger, praised the federal government's intention, announced Thursday, to ban the production, importation and exportation of asbestos products in Canada.

But more work needs to be done on a provincial level to protect workers from the harmful material, which is linked to more than 2,000 fatal cancer and other related diseases every year.

"This is the leading cause of death for workers so it's about time," said Lanzinger. "I will say, though, that this ban is not everything that needs to be done."

The next step, she said, is for the province to license asbestos removal firms and require mandatory certification for workers tasked with handling and removing it from buildings.

Lanzinger said she's concerned about the number of firms that have been found to be in violation of WorkSafe BC orders and continue to expose their employees to risk.

"The removal of asbestos is a huge problem," she said. "I think government do share our concern, they recognize that but they have not committed to what we suggest in terms of certification and licensing."

Washington State has a licensing and certification model in place for companies that remove asbestos, Lanzinger said.

"We're going to keep at it, we'll continue pushing our provincial government to do something about it," she said.

WorkSafe BC says workplace exposure to asbestos is "a major concern." Since 1996, there have been 1,016 deaths due to asbestos exposure in B.C., according to WorkSafe BC.

The four-storey Crosstown Elementary school is the first of its kind in B.C., according to the VSB. CONTRIBUTED

New school downtown

EDUCATION

Crosstown Elementary to open doors Sept. 2017

Wanyee Li
Metro | Vancouver

Several Vancouver schools narrowly escaped closure this fall, but a new 510-seat school in downtown is set to open September 2017 and now has a name: Crosstown Elementary.

The school, located at 55 Expo Blvd., in the Firenze building, will have a catchment area that includes Gastown, Chinatown, Yaletown, Downtown and Northeast False Creek.

A naming committee will consider a dual Indigenous name for the school once class is in session, according to a written release.

Crosstown Elementary's unique four-storey design inside a condo building makes it the first of its kind in B.C., said Vancouver School Board associate superintendent David Nelson.

"It doesn't have any grounds like a standard school," he said.

The school does have two decks for outdoor learning but students will use existing public playground and field nearby.

"The city is currently updating and doing some renovations to the playground at David Livingston (Park) which will be used by the school community as well as the public."

The school's classrooms are set up in clusters and feature shared spaces as well, he said.

"It really does allow for teachers to share in their expertise and to work together.

The school board plans to start registration for Crosstown Elementary in the new year. Nelson emphasized that no student in the catchment area will be forced to leave their existing school — enrolment to Crosstown is voluntary.

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Artists get Rogue One glimpse

STAR WARS

'We had so much fun working on it': VFX manager

Jen St. Denis
Metro | Vancouver

Somewhere in Vancouver are two theatres where a lucky few — those who made the vehicles explode and the blasters shoot — recently got an early sneak peek at Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.

"We keep (the locations) secret," said Hanna Price, manager of human resources for Industrial Light and Magic's Vancouver studio.

"We just don't want to advertise where they happen because we don't want to have to turn people away if they just showed up spontaneously."

Around 75 people from Vancouver worked on the digital effects for the blockbuster, representing a sixth of the entire global workforce of 500 who worked on the digital effects for the film.

Around 75 people from Vancouver worked on the digital effects for Rogue One: A Star Wars Story. CONTRIBUTED

Different scenes were split up among Industrial Light and Magic's studios in San Francisco, London and Singapore and Vancouver.

"We touch a number of different disciplines," said Andrew Poole, VFX production manager. "Animation is one of them, we have teams that do the digital environments, teams who (digitally) build the vehicles that you see, and some teams just specialize in blowing up vehicles and buildings."

ILM has studios around the world in order to attract global talent, Price said. Over the past few years, Vancouver has grown to be one of the biggest hubs for animation work, attracting studios like ILM and Sony Pictures Imageworks. ILM's Vancouver studio has also worked on movies like Star Wars: The Force Awakens, Pacific Rim, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and The Revenant.

With so much of Rogue One being created through digital effects, it takes a slew of very specific specializations to create the different elements of the movie.

"We have traditional artists who have learned to operate in a digital environment, we have computer engineers, we have physicists, we have biologists who are now animators so they know how to make a creature move realistically," Price said. She added that choosing the studio crew for a particular project "is not unlike casting an actor, because you have to have a very specific set of experience and skill."

The movie, which comes loaded with fan expectations, has so far opened to mostly good reviews. But the animators who watched the movie last night described two emotions: pride, and relief that the huge and complex project was finally complete.

"We had so much fun working on it and we were just so proud by the time it was over; to see it on the screen was incredibly exciting," Poole said.

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VANCOUVERING

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My bed, 'tis of thee — and also thee

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Graeme McRanor
For Metro

The bed is what got us here in the first place.

So it's no surprise that, since Suzy moved in, it's where things have really heated up.

This is because my son, now the de facto middleman, has a core temperature of approximately 350 degrees Celsius.

And he's a flailer.

Now, aside from his sporadic punches, kicks and headbutts, the only arguable beneficiary in our current sleeping arrangement is Suzy, who would still be looking to spoon if we were all spending a night on the surface of the sun.

Look, there's only so much territory up for grabs on a queen-size bed. And we're all battling each other for a sliver of it.

Some context: I'm a six-foot-three, 215-pound tosser (and turner) who — though no compelling documentary evidence has ever been produced — allegedly snores. London sleeps like a rock — specifically, one of those looping ones at the end of a bolas.

Suzy, for her part, usually wakes up in the exact position she fell asleep in, though she insists on bringing that burgeoning, basketball-sized belly to bed every night.

Fair to say, it's tight.

Yet in many cultures, sharing a bed or bedroom is normal.

In Japan, for example, parents reportedly sleep close to their kids, sometimes until they become teenagers.

In Glasgow, I'm told, four head-to-toe in a double bed was once not uncommon, movement synchronized, bedlam arising only when one of eight leg muscles cramped.

The flip side of the mattress: the eye-opening studies suggesting that, for young and old, sleep deprivation from chronic co-sleeping can cause memory loss, fatigue, low energy, depression and obesity.

And we'll all need our rest, since unborn baby is due next month.

Of course, she (it's a girl!) gets her own bassinet, since the bed is already fully booked.

I suppose, in the bedroom, we're all just looking for piece of mine.

Apparently, in some cultures, sharing a bed with offspring is perfectly normal.
GRAEME MCRANOR/FOR METRO

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Slow Braised Pot Roast Puttanesca

Ingredients

- 3 to 4 lb (1 1/2 to 2kg) beef chuck roast, trimmed of excess fat
- Salt and freshly-ground pepper
- 3 (45ml) Tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup (250ml) dry red wine
- 1 cup (250) beef stock
- 530ml (550g) Authentica World Cuisine Puttanesca Sauce
- 2 onions, quartered
- 8 carrots, diced into 1-inch (2.5cm) cubes
- 2 celery sticks, 1/2-inch thick sliced
- 2 cups (500ml) button mushrooms
- 2 bay leaves

Instructions

Season the roast with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the roast and sear on all sides until brown. Scatter the vegetables and add the bay leaves. Saute until the onions start to become translucent. Add the red wine, beef stock and the Puttanesca Sauce. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low. Simmer for 3 hours, basting every hour with the sauce, until the beef is fork tender.

Remove the roast, slice and arrange on a warm serving platter. Garnish with the vegetables. Serve with the sauce.

Serves 6 to 8

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VANCOUVERING

with icons by **Danielle Vallée** from the noun project

Copper-breaking still resonates

INDIGENOUS STORIES

Artist looking to bring ceremony overseas

Cara McKenna
For Metro

Several years after two transformative copper-breaking ceremonies, a master Kwakwaka'wakw carver and his daughter are bringing their culture to Europe.

Beau Dick and his daughter Linnea (Malidi) are taking part in the upcoming Documenta 14 exhibition: a prestigious months-long art event that takes over Kassel, Germany, every five years.

After their successful ceremonies in Canada, the pair — both based in Vancouver — hopes to bring the same power and healing overseas.

In 2013 and 2014, Beau made separate journeys to the B.C. Legislature and Parliament Hill, where he broke valuable copper shields in traditional shaming ceremonies directed against the provincial and federal governments.

Linnea said making the first journey from the northern tip of Vancouver Island to Victoria with her dad was life changing.

"When we broke the copper, it was such a powerful moment and I remember just feeling like this incredible weight had been lifted off my shoulders," she said at a public lecture at the University of British Columbia on Dec. 12.

"Since then I've moved forward and done nothing but improve upon myself and improve hopefully the lives around me. I really feel like I love myself now I can make healthy decisions."

Candice Hopkins, a curator for the 2017 Documenta, said the impacts of the copper breaking ceremonies are still resonating on a wider scale.

Kwakwaka'wakw carver Beau Dick and his daughter Linnea at a lecture at UBC on Monday. CARA MCKENNA/FOR METRO

"I think we're all experiencing collectively the kind of power that was unleashed with that action," she said.

"It re-instilled the fact that coppers are not objects, they're beings that have names and a great deal of power."

When Beau travels to Europe for the exhibition, taking place this year in both Athens and Kassel, he is bringing a group of people with him, along with a collection of masks and coppers.

"The masks won't be just on display but will be activated in various ways," Hopkins said, adding that all the details won't be revealed until later on.

Linnea also recently performed at one of the opening events for Documenta's public forum events, before the exhibition officially begins this spring.

Beau said he wants to address with his art issues such as the Syrian refugee crisis and what he sees as the downfall of democracy and Western civilization as a whole.

The masks he is bringing will be shown once before they are burned in ceremony to be returned to the spirit world.

"We're on a mission and the art is saying something, it's illustrating something," he said.

"It's drawing a picture for us, connecting the dots so we can accomplish what we're here for. And it's my conviction that we can create a world of well-being for every child."

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A wild beauty: the handcrafted wreath

VANCOUVER TRENDING

Amy Logan
For Metro | Vancouver

From DIY-ers to professional florists, Vancouverites are increasingly drawn to the beauty of a handcrafted wreath. Foraged from winter gardens, North Shore forests and urban back alleys, materials range from fallen cedar boughs to bright violet sprigs of beautyberry.

Several local businesses offer handcrafted wreaths, and wreath-making workshops seem to be popping up everywhere this season.

The modern wreath has a clean, carefully crafted aesthetic, with just a hint of wild abandon, exemplified by Kate Freeman's Weekend Flowers.

Working with plants grown in her community garden or foraged locally, she describes her business as "how my inner entrepreneur met my artistic pursuits, love of nature, and wish for community."

A local, hand-crafted wreath by Weekend Flowers.

Delivering flowers by bike, she follows seasonal rhythms, crafting vibrant bouquets and delicate wreaths.

Freeman's inspirations lie in "moods, colours, patterns, movies." Growing up in a forested area, she said she also finds her master gardener mother's design sensibilities "creeping into my consciousness, in the best possible way." Attributing Vancouver's love of handmade wreaths to part of a larger style trend, like "regional influences, or nostalgia cycles," she noted that "we are so lucky here; there is colour to be found year-round."

UBC Botanical Garden hosts its annual sale of fresh holiday wreaths until Dec. 23, while supplies last. Hyper-local, the wreaths are handcrafted by Friends of the Garden using unusual evergreens and berries gathered from the campus's botanical garden.

Inspired by the changing seasons, Rogue Florist crafts wreaths from foraged and local foliage for numerous markets and pop-up shops. Olla Flowers is currently co-hosting a pop-up flower shop (348 Water St.) with Studio Full Bloom featuring an assortment of flowers and handmade wreaths made from ethically sourced and local plants for the month of December.

Forage and Bloom offers B.C. forest-foraged wreaths in materials such as moss, grasses and berries, hosting wreath-making workshops, and selling their wreaths at various shops throughout December.

As Freeman said, "I enjoy the searching, the observing, wrangling something you've picked up off the ground into something elegant and beautiful. " Plus, "It's the year of the wreath! They smell great."

FOOD NOTES

WE INTERRUPT YOUR NOG BINGE TO BRING YOU SOME JUICE

Abby Wiseman
For Metro

It's getting closer to the holidays and I'm already feeling the excess. Cheese, bread, alcohol and cookies — let's not leave out chocolate. I'm attempting to avoid packing on the seasonal five pounds, so I thought I'd give the gut a break and try a little juicing.

Cold-press juicing is different from conventional juicing because it uses hydraulic pressure rather than a centrifuge and blade, which creates heat and cooks out some of the nutrients and enzymes.

I tried four juices at Melu Juice and Health Bar (1110 W. Pender St.). Each was served in a cute jar and ran me $9.75, a fairly middle-of-the-road price for cold press.

The first, Winter Wonderland, featured winter melon, apple, kale, spinach and celery. It was bright and refreshing with the melon coming through. Next, No Fruit in Here — kale, spinach, romaine lettuce, cucumber, parsley, ginger and lemon — was similar, but the ginger was warming and felt nice in the tummy on a winter day.

No. 3, The Hulk, had apple, romaine, jicama, lemon, kale, mint and ginger. It was my favourite: the mint, lemon and ginger made it interesting and I was felt energized after drinking it.

Last came Black Magic, with activated bamboo charcoal, cayenne, lemon, Himalayan pink salt, agave and pure filtered water. Activated charcoal is used to treat poisonings, reduce intestinal gas, prevent hangovers and lower cholesterol. Not something that should be taken every day, but once in a while should be OK.

The best part about Melu juices is that they're refreshing rather than sweet or too "green" tasting. And, having sampled them, I'm ready to dive right back into the eggnog.

Family believed dead in house fire

ONTARIO

First Nation community struggling with the loss

A father, three young children and a baby are believed to have died in a fire that destroyed their home and ripped apart this First Nation community amid efforts Thursday to recover and identify the charred remains of the victims.

Shocked community leaders and residents struggled to come to terms with the devastating loss that occurred about 12 hours after a blaze in Port Colborne, Ont., also claimed the lives of four family members.

"We've only started to understand what has happened," Randall Phillips, chief of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, said Thursday. "Our community is suffering. There's not a person in this community that doesn't know one of the victims or the victims' family."

Fire officials attend the scene of a house fire on Oneida Nation of the Thames reserve on Thursday. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Relatives of the dead were in shock, and heart-broken, Phillips said, adding that a forensic anthropologist had only managed to identify the remains of the adult and one of the children.

A man who said he was a brother of the deceased father shooed photographers from the blackened frame of the house on the edge of the town as firefighters and investigators worked in the wreckage of the home.

Firefighters arriving on the scene in frigid temperatures at about 11 a.m. Wednesday could do little more than douse the flames, which took about two hours. The cause remained under investigation.

Phillips, who said the two-storey home was old and "just basically kindling," lashed out at the federal government for rejecting the community's plea for funding to upgrade 50 of its houses, saying First Nations housing is in crisis.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Ayla Reznick with her dog Luna, who survived after being hit by a GO train in Toronto. EDUARDO LIMA/METRO

Lucky Luna survives being hit by a train

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Luna the dog is dog-gone lucky.

The precocious pup, an Australian shepherd-border collie mix, was hit by a GO train Dec. 7 in Toronto, Ont. Despite being pulled under the vehicle, she survived unscathed.

"It's a miracle," Luna's owner, Ayla Reznick, said. "I can't even imagine my life without Luna right now."

Luna slipped her leash while out for a walk in Parkdale. The dog walker tried to pursue her, Reznick said, but the pooch bolted.

Aided by members of the Lost and Found Pets of Ontario Facebook group, Reznick scoured the neighbourhood but didn't find Luna.

Luna eventually returned home on her own, and aside from a few mysterious scrapes and bruises, she was no worse for wear. She was given a clean bill of health from the vet the following day, Reznick said.

It wasn't until later that Reznick learned Luna's brief adventure nearly cost the dog her life.

A GO train operator named Jonathan Podzyhun reached out to her on Facebook, saying he was on board when the train hit a dog matching Luna's description. He was certain the dog had died.

"He was shocked and amazed that she was alright," Reznick said.

According to Reznick, Podzyhun told her the newer GO trains are a bit higher than older models, which could explain how Luna escaped harm. He also suspected a backpack the dog was wearing might have protected her.

METRO EXPLAINS

What the asbestos ban means

May Warren
Metro | Toronto

On Thursday the federal government announced a plan to ban manufacturing any products containing asbestos, and its import or export by 2018.

Metro breaks down the news and what it means for you.

What is it?

Asbestos refers to a group of minerals that, at its peak, was found in more than 3,000 applications around the world.

Why is it dangerous?

The World Health Organization declared asbestos a "human carcinogen" way back in 1987. Even small amounts of airborne asbestos fibres can cause lung cancer and a disease called asbestosis.

So there's a ban, yay us?

Canada is late to the game on the issue. Our last asbestos mine closed in 2011, but more than 50 nations have already banned the carcinogen. The government's move comes after decades of lobbying from labour groups, and people who have died or lost loved ones.

What else?

The government pledges to create new health and safety regulations to limit contact workers have with existing asbestos on the job, and expand the online list of buildings containing asbestos that it owns or rents.

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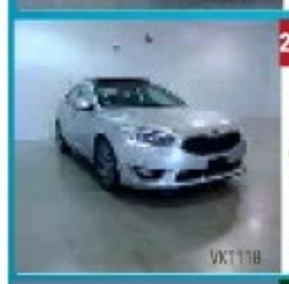

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Aleppo residents flee

Weeping, hobbling on crutches or dragging suitcases, hundreds of survivors of a devastating government bombardment and siege left the last sliver of opposition-held Aleppo on Thursday, an evacuation that sealed the end of the rebellion's most important stronghold and was a watershed moment in Syria's five-year-old civil war.

A smiling President Bashar Assad called it a historic event comparable to the birth of Christ and the revelation of the Qur'an.

A UN official described it as "a black chapter in the history of international relations."

Under a surrender deal brokered by Russia and Turkey, tens of thousands of residents and rebel fighters are being evacuated to opposition-controlled areas in the surrounding countryside.

Syrians who were evacuated from rebel-held neighbourhoods arrive in Khan al-Aassal region, in west Aleppo. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Eastern Aleppo rose in revolt against Assad in 2012 and battled since then with the western, government-held part of the city in one of the most horrific and destructive fronts of the civil war.

The rebels' hold in Syria's one-time commercial powerhouse was a major point of pride, and at times it seemed an invulnerable part of what was once a growing opposition-held patch of territory in the north.

But government forces finally surrounded eastern Aleppo and then battered it to pieces. The air and ground campaign by Syrian troops — backed by Russian warplanes and forces from Assad's regional allies — relentlessly wore away at the enclave.

Hundreds of civilians were killed, and tens of thousands fled to government-held areas. The pocket was reduced to a few blocks packed with the bloodied, exhausted and demoralized but also die-hard opposition forces.

"History is being made," an upbeat Assad proclaimed in a video. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VOICES OF THE DISPLACED

Displaced residents describe violence and food shortages to the UNHCR

We had a house, but it was completely destroyed. It was very shocking to see our home turned to ruins. Bader, 12

I am very scared of what the future might hold for us, and especially for my daughters. Aziza, a single mother

We used to be given bags of bread, but then bread stopped and there was just rice. Then there was no rice. Mohammad, 16

Andrea Bocelli performs in Budapest. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

We ignore dual realities at our peril

Rosemary Westwood relocates to the U.S. She chronicles her observations in a weekly column for Metro.

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD
From the U.S.

For a minute there, it appeared as if the only star president-elect Donald Trump could scrounge up to sing at his inauguration was the runner-up in 2010's America's Got Talent, Jackie Evancho.

Not exactly in keeping with the Trump Hotel motto "Never Settle."

And it felt so right. Who could possibly want to serenade into power the most dangerous president elected in my lifetime? Who could want to sing those myth-making lyrics "land of the free" to a man in favour of voter suppression and media suppression, deporting an entire religion and jailing innocents, a man who takes his leadership cues from Vladimir Putin, who lies to his supporters in order to cement his own power?

The answer, it turns out, is Andrea Bocelli. I'll never hear that duet with Celine Dion the same way again.

It's still a bit gratifying to know that most of Hollywood, whose opinions I care little about otherwise, is MIA on this one.

Of course, Donald Trump's own celebrity has never really translated into widespread celebrity political love. (Aside from Kanye West's less-than-gushing support, Alec, the lesser of the Baldwins, and the actress from Clueless who wasn't Cher or Tai.)

But the lack of Hollywood support certainly didn't bother Trump's base, who seem to view celebrities (minus Trump himself) as de facto "elites" (a term now devoid of meaning, since it also appears to apply to every New Yorker, including nearly half of the city that's living in or near poverty).

Indeed, some might not care who sings about "the rockets' red glare" this time. What looks bad from where I'm sitting, clearly, looks completely different to someone who voted for Trump.

That acceptance comes with a few requirements.

The first is to remember that while I'm rolling my eyes at reports in the Daily Beast that Trump wanted Aretha Franklin to sing for him (Aretha?!), some of Trump's 46 per cent of the U.S. electorate are reading on Breitbart that President Obama's investigation into Russian hacking is just sour grapes after the Democrats lost the election.

There are two American realities, and we ignore the one we're not living in at our own peril.

Which brings us to the other requirement: Anyone outraged at the election results has some studying to do. Go read Fox News. Browse Red State. Click on a few Breitbart links. Even, God forbid, peruse Info Wars.

The day after the election, On The Media's Brooke Gladstone argued the radio show — which reports on the media — has a new goal: "To make what seems to have been invisible to us and everyone we know, visible."

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Employee health benefits going to the dogs, and cats

SERVICES

Store looks to make fancy pet food part of company plans

Trish Donnelly has worked under celebrated Toronto chef Jamie Kennedy and helmed trendy spots from Oyster Boy on Queen St. W. to Mildred's Temple Kitchen in Liberty Village.

These days the executive chef with the perfect pedigree is making a dog's breakfast on Queen St. E. — and loving it.

As top chef of the new, high-end and healthy pet food store Tom&Sawyer, she still puts her considerable chops to good use, whipping up restaurant quality dishes like sous vide salmon, tuna with sweet potato and Italian beef pasta for a less lippy, if not more yappy, clientele.

"My friends weren't surprised when they found out. They said, 'Well, you like dogs more than people anyway'," she says with a giggle.

Kristin Matthews and Peter Zakarow, with dog Sawyer, are owners and co-founders of the Tom&Sawyer. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Of course, making gourmet grub in a shiny, open kitchen that looks like something you'd see at a top-notch establishment doesn't come cheap (some meals are priced at $11 a pop.) So owners Kristin Matthews and Peter Zakarow have partnered with digital upstart League to get the fancy food onto some employee benefit plans.

League's digital platform, accessed through an app, provides companies with health spending accounts, lifestyle spending accounts and workplace health services for employees.

"We are aware that pets are a huge part of people's lives — especially for millennials," says League founder and CEO Michael Serbinis.

"This is a driving reason why League is investigating pet-related services and products in our health marketplace," he says, noting he's expecting to see good traction from clients for the offbeat offering.

Most big insurance companies like Sun Life and Manulife offer flexible benefit packages to employees that provide tax-free services such as physiotherapy and massage therapy. Lifestyle or wellness spending accounts also offer workers taxable benefits such as gym memberships and nutritional supplements — but healthy pet food is pretty new to the mix, he says.

There are also plenty of companies, from Hudson's Bay Financial Services to Home Depot, that offer pet insurance for veterinary services, which pet owners know can be very pricey if their pooch or feline gets sick.

"While many companies offer perks such as 'take your dog to work', only a few companies have started to make veterinary coverage available under employee benefit plans," Serbinis says.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook starting to fight fake news

Facebook is taking new measures to curb the spread of fake news on its social network. It will focus on the "worst of the worst" offenders and partner with outside fact-checkers and news organizations to sort honest news from made-up stories.

The social network will make it easier for users to report fake news when they see it. If enough people report a story as fake, Facebook will pass it to third-party fact-checking organizations.

Stories that flunk the fact check won't be removed from Facebook. But they'll be publicly flagged as "disputed," which will force them to appear lower down in people's news feed. Users can click on a link to learn why that is. And if people decide they want to share the story with friends anyway, they can — but they'll get another warning.

WHY FAKE NEWS MATTERS

Fake political stories have drawn outsized attention because of the possibility that they influenced public perceptions and could have swayed the U.S. presidential election.

There have been dangerous real-world consequences. A fake story about a child sex ring at a Washington, D.C., pizza joint prompted a man to fire an assault rifle inside the restaurant.

FACEBOOK AND FAKE NEWS

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said that fake news constitutes less than one per cent of what's on Facebook, but critics say that's wildly misleading. For a site with nearly 2 billion users tapping out posts by the millisecond, even one per cent is a huge number, especially since the total includes everything that's posted on Facebook — photos, videos and daily updates in addition to news articles.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

The social network's first public step toward fixing the fake-news problem since the election was a statement barring fake-news sites from using its lucrative ad network. Now, Facebook says it has also eliminated the ability for spammers to masquerade as real news organizations by spoofing domains.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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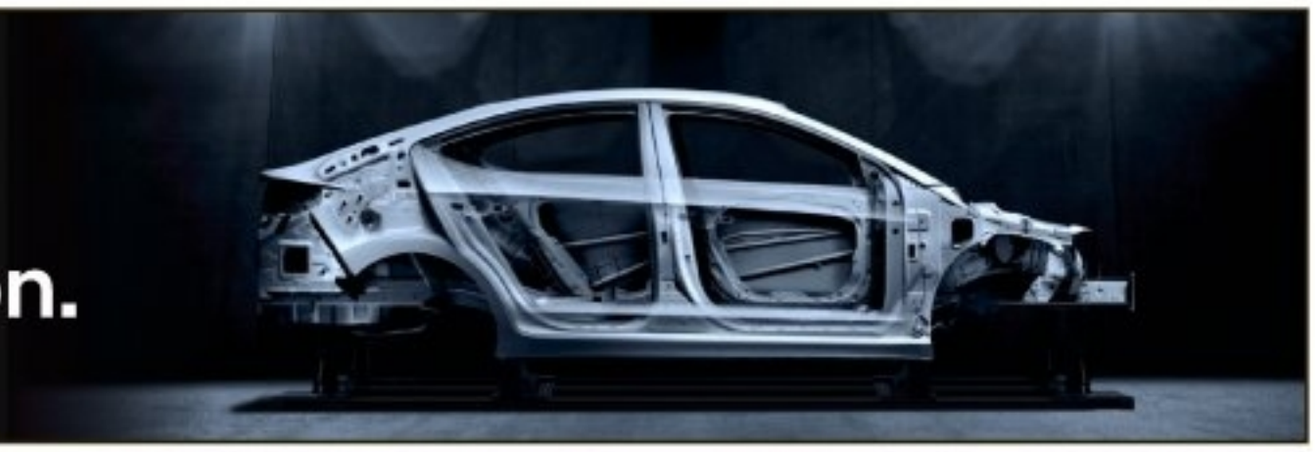

metro SCIENCE

Your essential daily news

No bones about it: Evolutionary biologists believe humans lack the penis bone our direct ancestors have because we spend less time having sex

DECODED by Genna Buck and Andrés Plana

DINOSAURS REALLY DID HAVE FEATHERS

A Chinese scientist browsing a market in Myanmar has stumbled onto **the find of the century.** What first appeared to be a fragment of a bird's tail suspended in 99-million-year old amber in fact belongs to a coelurosaur — a feathered, sparrow-sized dinosaur. **But what is amber and where does it get its enchanting ability to capture an ancient moment and freeze it in time?**

Amber starts out as sticky tree resin. Over many years, a series of chemical reactions turns hardened resin into glassy amber. Smelly, reactive chemicals, called volatiles, dissipate, and the rings of hydrogen and carbon that remain arrange themselves into long chains of molecules called polymers. Once the volatiles are gone and the **polymerization** is complete, the resin, sometimes with debris or dead critters trapped inside, is amber.

Fair feather find

Using microscopes and a CT scanner, scientists at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum were the first to ever see dinosaur feathers in glorious 3D. They're white and brown, and more delicately structured than modern bird feathers, lacking the strong central rod.

As a result, this dino probably couldn't fly: a clue feathers may have first evolved for a purpose other than flight. Unlike in birds, the tail's **vertebrae were not fused into one bone,** but segmented and able to bend in several places at once.

Who was this dinosaur?

A pocket-sized member of the T. rex's family, **coelurosauria**. It walked upright and feasted on insects.

Sorry, Jurassic Park fans, scientists are pretty sure **dino DNA can't survive in amber**. Earlier experiments that suggested this was possible seem to have picked up stray DNA from the lab.

FINDINGS
Your week in science

SUMUKHA T. N.

MAGIC MENAGERIE
Scientists have been known to give goofy names to genes (sonic hedgehog) and animals (Pieza kake). Now J.K. Rowling has given her seal of approval to another silly-sounding species: Eriovixia gryffindori, a spider that looks remarkably like the Hogwarts sorting hat.

SAD ZIKA STUDY
The most detailed study yet of pregnant women in Brazil with confirmed Zika virus has revealed a scary truth: more than half had a miscarriage, stillbirth, or baby with a devastating brain abnormality.

SOUND SMART

NOMENCLATURE

DEFINITION
Nomenclature is a scientific system for naming and categorizing something, like chemical compounds, animals or time periods. Biologists use binomial nomenclature (genus and species in italics) for living things like *Homo sapiens.*

USE IT IN A SENTENCE
The international community should adopt formal **nomenclature** for Pokemon. Their names are cutesy and random; they don't provide any useful information.

CITIZEN SCIENTIST by Genna Buck

Why doesn't the sun fry the earth?

The sun injects a lot of energy into Earth, yet the temperature here is relatively stable. The Earth must be losing a similar amount of heat. How does that work? — Dexter

You're right. The Earth absorbs radiation from the sun and releases a similar amount out into space. But not exactly the same amount. And that's a problem.

Solar energy is constantly being soaked up and spat back out by the land and oceans. Some is reflected by clouds and bright surfaces like polar ice caps, and some is absorbed by the cosy blanket of **greenhouse gases** that surrounds our planet. They keep the atmosphere at an average of 14 C, warmer than it otherwise would be (-18 C, the temperature on the atmosphere-less moon).

All in all, our planet exists in a state of **energy balance**. I think of it as a bathtub with the plug pulled and the tap on: We experience a consistent, comfortable temperature level because solar energy is pouring in and draining out at the same rate. At least, that's what's supposed to happen.

You may have heard something about how we're pouring more and more greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane into the air by burning fossil fuels and raising animals.

These gases have atoms are loosely bound together, and when they heat up, they vibrate and move around. They release the energy as heat, which other greenhouse gases absorb. This continuous process of passing heat back and forth between molecules keeps more of the sun's energy close to the Earth, with familiar consequences: Rising mercury, rising oceans, and doomsday if we don't do anything about it.

This process, **the greenhouse effect**, is also the reason the ocean isn't frozen. It sure is harder to deny something is real when you learn the details of how it works.

Science Question?
Tweet @genna_buck

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metro WEEKEND

Your essential daily news

MOVIES MUSIC TELEVISION DIGITAL

That first flash of the Force...

IN FOCUS

A long time ago, in a galaxy not too far away, we were all wowed

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

February 3, 1959 and February 9, 1964. The day the music died and the date it was reborn on the Ed Sullivan Show, both days burned into the collective memories of pop culture fanatics everywhere.

But what about May 25, 1977?

If you were a teenager then chances are you felt the earth shift. It was the day Star Wars opened, kicking off a cultural phenomenon that continues to this day.

This weekend the universe George Lucas unleashed in 1977 grows to include Rogue One: A Star Wars Story. Much-anticipated, the movie is the first of the standalone Star Wars Anthology films and is expected to decimate the competition, Death Star style.

Expect line-ups and packed theatres — box office seers estimate it could pull in somewhere between $130 million to $150 million at the U.S. box office this week — but no matter how wild the weekend gets, nothing will match the pandemonium that greeted Star Wars in May, 1977.

To paint a picture of the first blush of Star Wars mania I asked my Facebookers what they remember about that moment a long time ago, in a galaxy (not so) far, far away...

"I remember being so in awe of that legendary opening scene with the giant spaceship coming into picture from the top and filling up the entire screen… oooo, aaaaah," wrote Glenda Fordham. "The audience gasped in unison."

"Upon leaving the theatre, with my little mind totally blown, I was interviewed by the news," recollected Lesley Mitchell-Clarke, "where I think that I said, 'Anything is now possible cinematically.' I was all of 19."

"My stepbrother, who was seven at the time, was dead set against seeing it," says Tina Cooper, "and then of course saw it at least 50 times and dressed in Star Wars gear and played with Star Wars toys every single day for the rest of his childhood."

"The line-up went right around the block and we ended up sitting in the front row of the balcony," recalled Chris Ball "I was mesmerized but dad was bored. Part way through I guess he decided he might as well get comfortable. He took his jacket off and in the process knocked his popcorn over the balcony railing. We got a stern lecture from the manager and almost got thrown out. Fast forward 20 years (1997) and I am now the manager of the same theatre and handing out those stern lectures."

"I was six," remembered Sue Edworthy. "My Dad took me to see it. I fell asleep halfway through. He took me to see it again. I fell asleep halfway through. The seventh time, I finally saw the whole thing. Clearly he had no problem seeing it again, and again, and again."

"It was the first film that I went to more than once in its initial run," said Adrian Gruff. "In the scene where the X-Wings enter the Death Star's trench, I disengaged from the screen just so I could watch everyone's heads do the sideways bob and twist that mine had done on first viewing.

"It was the first time that I had a true inkling as to the energy that religion refers to as 'God.'"

MOVIE RATINGS by Richard Crouse

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story	★★★★
Collateral Beauty	★

HOW RATING WORKS
★★★★ SEE IT
★★★ WORTHWHILE
★★ UP TO YOU
★ SKIP IT

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story will give another new generation that trademark thrill of facing up to the Force for the very first time. CONTRIBUTED

INTERVIEW

Debutant Terrell finds his most powerful voice

As he prepared to play a young Barack Obama on the big screen, Devon Terrell shed his Australian accent, altered his body language and started practising his part on strangers he met on the streets of New York City.

Barry, which premieres on Netflix on Friday, examines the life of the U.S. president back when he was still a confused student in his junior year at Columbia University.

"I would go onto the streets and practise it. It was that thing of just getting out of your comfort zone," said Terrell, who at the time had never appeared in a feature film.

"If I could do it to a stranger and they could believe me, then I'm sure I could do it on set with an actor."

Terrell said he was struck by how relatable Obama was in the film's script.

"We weren't trying to just throw something in your face and say 'this used to be the president.' It just felt like if you take out the name Barack Obama, it could have been anybody," he said.

Terrell's co-star, Anya Taylor-Joy, plays a white woman Obama starts dating from his political science class.

For Taylor-Joy, the film tells a universal story, despite its high-profile protagonist.

"I think everyone can connect to it," she said. "I hope people leave feeling a little bit less alone, a little bit like, 'Oh, so the most powerful man in the world felt the way that I felt, that I didn't belong and I couldn't find my scene.'"

That idea of being able to relate to a sitting president also appealed to film director Vikram Gandhi.

"When you're 20 years old and you go to New York for the first time, it's like everybody is a blank slate that is learning from that experience, and everybody at that time in their life is really trying to figure out who they are," he said. "Also all the ideas about race that are happening in it are still extremely relevant right now."

The film had a personal connection for Gandhi, who happened to also attend Columbia and live in the same neighbourhood Obama did in university.

"It was a time in my life where I was just trying to figure out a lot of things but because I lived on that block I just knew, well that's the bodega that's on the block," Gandhi said.

"It's a time when it was clear he was confronted with so many different options and there were so many different directions he could have gone in and I had the same experience. It felt natural that this was a story I could tell."

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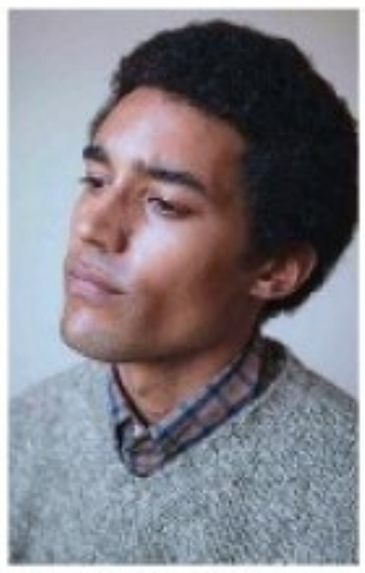

Australian rookie Devon Terrell found relatable ground in Barry. CONTRIBUTED

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In Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, British-Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed plays Bodhi Rook, a former Imperial pilot who takes his technical skills across to the Rebel Alliance. CONTRIBUTED

Galaxy's recruit a loveable rogue

INTERVIEW

Riz Ahmed admits he was a troublemaker on Star Wars set

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

Like a lot of kids Riz Ahmed liked Star Wars. Unlike most kids he grew up to be part of the franchise, playing pilot Bodhi Rook in Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.

"I was a fan," says Ahmed, also known as Riz MC, who earlier this year starred in HBO's The Night Of. "I remember watching the films the first time round with my older brother. I was about six or seven years old. They were kind of my only memory of watching any movie at all. They left a massive impact on me. I remember running around with my brother for years, acting out our own weird sci-fi stories. Even though I didn't understand the storyline – I was too young – the level of imagination and detail that went into those movies.... It made an impression."

Yet, while the originals left an impression on the younger Ahmed, it was only when he joined the universe himself that he realized his level of fandom might not have been quite at the level he had thought.

"It's only now that I have met real Star Wars fans that I realize I wasn't really a fan," he says. "I thought I was. Star Wars fans are dedicated, loyal fans. I think the kind of vibe I've gotten so far is that they are really excited to see a film that both preserves the legacy and the inheritance of the Star Wars saga but is also something a little different, fresh, distinctive and separate from the other films. I think that can be a really tricky balance to achieve but I think they have really done that. "

> **It's only now that I have met real Star Wars fans that I realize I wasn't really a fan. I though I was.**
> Riz Ahmed

Rogue One is the first standalone Star Wars Anthology film — upcoming movies in the expanded cinematic universe will focus on Han Solo and Boba Fett — and takes place after the formation of the Galactic Empire, shortly before the events of Episode IV: A New Hope.

The Rebel Alliance has recruited former criminal Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones) to collaborate with a team to retrieve the blueprints of the Death Star, the Empire's armoured battle station capable of destroying entire planets.

Ahmed plays a recruit, a former Imperial pilot with strong technical skills. Producer Kathleen Kennedy calls the character "a troublemaker."

"It is interesting she calls Bodhi Rook a troublemaker," Ahmed laughs. "I sometimes wonder if she is talking about me on the film set. Bodhi is somebody who is thrust into a really unfamiliar set of circumstances. He is just an Imperial cargo pilot, an average Joe trying to earn a living. It is a company town he lives in, the occupied planet of Jedha, so he works for the Empire. He's really thrust into a new set of circumstances that force him to reconsider his allegiances and what he's doing in these turbulent times."

Working beside Ahmed are Diego Luna, Donnie Yen and Forest Whitaker, making Rogue One the most diverse of all the Star Wars films.

"I think it just makes sense that our film reflects the society around us," says the British Pakistani actor, "and also the audience watching the films. A story like Star Wars is a global story. It belongs to all of us.

"Audiences around the world are excited about Star Wars so it makes sense that when they think about who might be the best actors for these roles they cast their net really wide all around the world. 'Yeah, we'll have Ben Mendelsohn from Australia, Forest Whittaker from L.A. and Mads Mikkelsen from over here.' I'm lucky to have been caught up in this net as well."

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Not all iconic movies were box-office blockbusters when they were first released. Sometimes it takes a mixture of luck, patience, finding the right audience and big changes in the industry before a film really takes off. Here are four movies that earned cult status against all odds:

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975): Though the stage musical it was based on was a sensation, the movie flopped twice before it became part of the midnight movie craze of the late '70s. Midnight screenings, lax distribution rules, and audience participation went on to make it the longest-running release in film history.

And Now For Something Completely Different (1971): Independently financed by a Playboy executive who was certain Monty Python's Flying Circus could be repackaged for American audiences, this movie proved to be a dud on its initial release. However, once the Monty Python TV show was broadcast on PBS in its original format, the film was re-released to great financial and cultural success among fans eager for more.

Attack of the Killer Tomatoes (1978): This schlock horror parody recouped its modest budget, but was critically panned and didn't make any real box office waves. That is until younger audiences discovered the home video release. The film's second life on video-store shelves generated enough buzz to justify the filming of sequels a decade later, and videogame and cartoon spinoffs in the '90s.

Heavy Metal (1981): This Canadian classic had a respectable box office draw for an animated sci-fi fantasy film based on a counter-culture magazine, but that success was eclipsed by a soundtrack album full of massive '80s rock hits. The popularity of the soundtrack was nearly solely responsible for the film's cult status, since music licensing issues kept it from home video for over a decade, only allowing it to be seen occasionally on TV, or as a midnight movie in theatres.

Rediscover some of the most beloved cult films of all time. The Hollywood Suite Free Preview is on now until Jan. 5. Enjoy the best movies of the '70s, '80s, '90s and 2000s uncut and commercial-free on four HDTV channels and On Demand, available on most TV providers.

See all these films on Hollywood Suite this month. Catch a cult film triple bill of And Now For Something Completely Different, Attack of the Killer Tomatoes and The Rocky Horror Picture Show, Dec. 17 on the Hollywood Suite '70s Movies channel and ring in the new year with Heavy Metal on the Hollywood Suite '80s Movies channel Dec. 31. Learn more at hollywoodsuite.ca/freepreview.

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Death, love and grief all part of the process

FILM DEVELOPMENT

Star-studded cast opened up script to improvement

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

Edward Norton, director David Frankel and Will Smith behind the scenes on the set of drama Collateral Beauty. BARRY WETCHER

Collateral Beauty had a long Hollywood history before director David Frankel came on board. Hugh Jackman was attached at one point and Rachel McAdams had been approached to play a part.

The long development came to an end when Will Smith signed on to play Howard Inlet, a charismatic advertising kingpin who becomes despondent after the death of his six-year-old daughter.

"When I came on it, it felt like it was written in stone," says Frankel. "Everybody loved the screenplay and we were going in three months and then people started whispering, 'I wish we could fix that.' So it turned out to be a pretty normal development process where we tried a lot of stuff.

"Once the actors got involved, Professor Will Smith, Professor Edward Norton and Professor Kate Winslet, there was a lot more writing. Mostly condensing. Edward had this brilliant vision of the movie as a screwball comedy, which I think was really smart. Will always said, 'We have to make the first half of the movie as funny as possible so that we don't kill people.' We worked on that."

The changes continued into the shooting. In the story Howard spends his nights practising self-therapy, writing angry letters to the abstractions of Time, Love and Death demanding answers as to why his child was taken. In the original script he met the abstractions, personified by Jacob Latimore, Keira Knightley and Helen Mirren, in a different order than in the finished film.

"It was written where he first ran into Love, then Time then Death," says Frankel. "We shot them in the order, Death, Time, Love so as we were approaching Love Will and I were still arguing about whether Love should be first or last in the sequence.

"We had prepped for six months up to that moment thinking Love was first. He came to me the day before and said, 'I think Love should be last.' I fought him tooth and nail about it because I really thought that moment on the train when he confronts Death was the pivotal moment and then it rained and because of the weather (the shots) wouldn't have matched. The sequence wouldn't have made sense.

"Of course Will said, 'God works in mysterious ways.' But Will Smith got his way. Big surprise."

The movie details the anguish Howard feels and the steps his friends take to help him reconnect with the world.

"I have seen some pretty profound grief," says Frankel. "My wife lost her mom six years ago and grief really can distort someone's connection to the universe. I learned you don't just get over it. That's why the line Helen (Mirren) has, I think is the most profound line in the movie. 'Nothing is really ever dead if you look at it right.'

"That I thought was really beautiful. That is how we all live on, in memory, not in fact."

It may seem like an odd subject for a Christmas film but Frankel says, "In holiday movies you always want a sense of hope. That's ultimately what we dreamed of for this movie.

"I know when Will saw it for the first time he ran to hug Willow who was in the audience with him. People want to connect and realize the fragility of our time here."

INTERVIEW

Emotional Smith relishes his role

Will Smith had already begun researching his role for Collateral Beauty when he learned that his father was terminally ill.

Smith said at the film's world premiere in New York on Monday that he had to channel the emotions of that tragic news into a demanding film role. Smith's father, Willard Carroll Smith Jr., died on Nov. 7.

"My father was diagnosed and given six weeks, so you know, to be hit with that in the process and then what we decided to do was just use the preparation of the character to actually deal with what my father was experiencing," Smith said. "It became our way of saying goodbye, essentially. It was a really beautiful confluence of art and life."

Smith stars as a father who suffers a great tragedy and begins to question his existence.

"It is such a beautiful concept. It's a guy that experiences a loss and gets furious at the universe, and writes these letters to Love, Time and Death, and his mind is so twisted that he mails the letters. And then, Love, Time and Death respond. You know, it's that beautiful Christmas twist to it, but dealing with real issues," Smith said.

The film also stars Helen Mirren in the role of Death. She admitted to loving the script, and felt it shared the same vibe as classics like It's a Wonderful Life and A Christmas Carol.

"There was something very, very true in the centre of it. And kind of as a Christmas movie, you know it's kind of a pretty cool Christmas gift of a movie," Mirren said.

Will Smith as Howard and Jacob Latimore as Raffi in Collateral Beauty. CONTRIBUTED

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The Eyes of my Mother actress Kika Magalhaes says she went a little bit crazy preparing for the role. HANDOUT

FILM

The making of a female serial killer

Chris Alexander
For Metro Canada

Ever since Roman Polanski trapped Catherine Deneuve in a Paris apartment and watched her lose her mind in 1965's Repulsion, horror cinema has had an enduring infatuation with the psychotic woman.

There's something unsettling about this dynamic, taking our hard-wired societal perceptions of femininity and twisting them, making them unstable and often evil.

Director Nicolas Pesce's alarming black and white psychodrama The Eyes of my Mother is another in this unending line of crazy-lady shockers, and it's also one of the best films of 2016.

Charting the damaged upbringing of an upstate New York farm girl named Francisca and her even more broken and lethal adult life, the film stars newcomer Kika Magalhaes in a bravura yet muted performance.

Magalhaes is even more impressive because no matter Francisca's transgressions, she manages to make the character sympathetic and someone we — against our better judgement — deeply care about.

"I never saw her as serial killer," Magalhaes told Metro on the cusp of the film's limited release this Friday. "I saw her as loving. All the horrific acts she commits come from a deep need for affection. She doesn't know how to express love because she was never shown this. She can't bear to see people leave her and I think that she thinks that she's always doing the right thing. It's not as simple as just good and evil."

The Eyes of my Mother does see Francisca committing murder and worse in order to sate her illness, but the film is not exploitation, nor does it revel in a high body count and gratuitous bloodshed. Still, no child should be let near the movie as it's about as dark and depressing as the genre gets. Credit Pesce and Magalhaes' close collaboration during pre-production on ensuring that Francisca is a fully fleshed out female.

"Originally, it was all killing, killing and more killing. Then, we had a religious allegory driving it and then it just became her story," the actress says.

"Nicolas made sure I watched all the key Hitchcock films, Under the Skin, the Lars von Trier movies and then I researched serial killers like Ted Bundy and maniacs like Charles Manson. To be honest, I felt like I was going a bit crazy myself during the process!"

Since its divisive premiere at Sundance earlier this year ("at least 30 people walked out," Magalhaes says), The Eyes of my Mother has gone on to festival success and great acclaim and was just released theatrically in the U.S. last week.

But because it was Magalhaes' first feature film and because she was so creatively involved, the actress is genuinely concerned that she has been spoiled by such a wonderful first cinematic dance partner.

Can Moonlight spark a black gay renaissance?

ANALYSIS

Coming-of-age story explores issue rarely seen in mainstream

Neil Armstrong
For Torstar News Service

The acclaimed drama Moonlight has become a leading awards contender this season, giving hope for diversity in the year after #OscarsSoWhite.

But the story it tells, of a young black man slowly coming to terms with his homosexuality, is one rarely seen in mainstream culture — until recently that is. On film, on television and onstage, there seems to be a sudden convergence of art forms telling the stories of black queer people, especially males.

Moonlight joins the similarly themed 2015 indie film Blackbird, plus the hip-hop drama Empire on Fox, which introduced a gay love interest for Jussie Smollett's character Jamal earlier this year, and the complicated, diverse LGBTQ characters of Orange Is the New Black.

Onstage in Toronto, black queer characters were front and centre in productions this year including Secrets of a Black Boy, How Black Mothers Say I Love You and, notably, in Black Boys, a "timely exploration of queer male blackness" that just ended a run at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

Are these productions part of a "black queer renaissance" as some have called it?

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times before Moonlight had its first public screening at the Telluride Film Festival, director Barry Jenkins said, "This movie was made for anybody who has ever felt other or like they can't be themselves and be accepted in society."

Compared to now, in the '90s such content was almost nonexistent.

There were exceptions, such as Jeffrey Wright's portrayal of the title artist in the 1996 movie Basquiat, and Queen Latifah's portrayal of a very proud lesbian in Set It Off.

And then there was Will Smith's intriguing yet problematic lead in the 1993 movie Six Degrees of Separation (played onstage by Courtney B. Vance).

At the time there was some controversy over Smith's portrayal of a gay character — a lying, promiscuous one at that — and what it might mean for his career. If anything, it helped.

Actor Ashton Sanders plays one of three stages of Chiron, the focus of Moonlight, Barry Jenkins' lauded coming-of-age story. CONTRIBUTED

Fast forward to now and Les Fabian Brathwaite of Out Magazine writes: "For the first time since perhaps the Harlem Renaissance, the souls of queer black folk have been depicted on our own terms as we take control of our narratives. . . This is the new renaissance."

Thomas Olajide, one of the stars of Black Boys, thinks it's a matter of serendipity to have a play he and his co-creators had been working on for four years come out at the same time that Moonlight is picking up award season buzz, including six Golden Globe nominations this week.

"It just seems like it's the climate for these stories to be unearthing very naturally," he says. "Perhaps we're all reaching a level of fatigue with not hearing those stories."

His co-star, Stephen Jackman-Torkoff, says "it's not just males but a lot of female queer people of colour (who) are really driving" the surge of such stories, at least on Toronto stages.

"Our communities have always existed," says playwright d'bi young anitafrika (She Mami Wata & The Pussy WitchHunt). "Whose visibility validates this idea of a renaissance?"

Having worked in the arts for 20 years, she notes, "What I can say is I do see a change in the visibility of black queerness in more dominant public spaces."

But Kimahli Powell, who directed Secrets of a Black Boy and sits on the board of the Inside Out LGBT Film Festival, says we shouldn't expect this supposed renaissance to continue.

"No doubt that Moonlight is a seminal work and its breakthrough is important," he says. "Yet when these moments happen — and they have in the past — we hope Hollywood has embraced storytelling and yet things remain the same.

"#OscarsSoWhite was just last year."

In terms of queer cinema, Powell notes people thought Brokeback Mountain would open doors for more movies representing LGBT people. That was a decade ago and little has changed.

"We definitely should celebrate that these stories happen to be shared at this moment but, unless there is a deeper shift in decision-making, we shouldn't expect more black queer art anytime soon."

"This movie was made for anybody who has ever felt other or like they can't be themselves and be accepted in society.
Barry Jenkins, Moonlight director

CONTRIBUTED

A wow-worthy cheese platter

Impress with a tasty centre-piece for your festive table

Even if you love the holidays, the round of shopping, entertaining and decorating can begin to feel like an endurance test. So when planning for the next holiday get-together, nix the late-night baking sessions and make it easy on yourself by serving a simple but sumptuous cheese plate.

Here's what you need to know to create a showstopper:

Can you ever have enough cheese?
Okay, the answer to that is a resounding no. But as a rule of thumb, cheese experts suggest choosing three to five different cheeses and counting on about 90 to 150 grams of cheese total per person for an appetizer plate; 45 to 60 grams total per person for an after-dinner plate; and 250 grams total per person for a cheese tasting.

Compare and contrast
When it comes to determining what cheese should grace your plate, opt for a variety of tastes and textures. Choose three to five cheeses, including a hard cheese such as Canadian Parmesan, a semi-hard cheese like Canadian Aged Gouda or Cheddar, with a soft bloomy cheese (think a delicately runny Canadian Brie or Canadian Camembert) and perhaps a rich veiny Canadian Blue, a nutty Canadian Swiss Cheese or a smoked cheese.

Add a little oomph
Savoury nuts, marinated olives, cured meats or sun-dried tomatoes will add colour and variety to your plate. And the sweetness of honey, dried fruits, fig jam or chutney and plump grapes, sweet berries or crisp slices of apple or pear make a fine complement.

Room to breathe
Set your cheese out at room temperature at least 30 minutes prior to serving to let the flavours develop. Allow space between the cheeses on the plate and provide a separate serving knife for each to avoid muddling the flavours. Make it easy for guests to identify their favourites by labelling each cheese. And carve a few slices to get the ball rolling, as guests may hesitate to be the first one to, well, cut the cheese.

To Cheddar and beyond

There was a time when the most exotic cheese you were likely to find on your grocery-store shelf was a sharp Cheddar. But in recent years, B.C. cheese-makers have been pushing the envelope, producing a range of fine artisanal cheeses. Here are a few local 100 per cent Canadian cow's milk cheese stars and their mouth-watering offerings:

- *Natural Pastures Cheese Co. (Courtenay): Cherry Bocconcini, Comox Brie (both 2015 Canadian Cheese award winners) and Smoked Boerenkaas.*
- *The Farmhouse Natural Cheeses (Agassiz): Clothbound Old Cheddar, Heidi (both 2015 Canadian Cheese award winners), Camembert and Quark.*
- *Little Qualicum Cheeseworks (Parksville): Fromage Frais, Bleu Claire Blue Cheese, Monterey Jill.*
- *Kootenay Meadows (Creston): Nostrala and Alpindon.*
- *Golden Ears Cheesecrafters (Maple Ridge): Jersey Blue, Brie and Gouda.*

Splurge or thrift for ideal gifts

Spend big or spend small, two shopping experts reveal their secrets to finding the perfect present for everyone on your list

Jacqueline Kovacs

A self-confessed holiday shopping splurger, Loukia Zigoumis, the Ottawa-based lifestyle blogger and shopping and travel expert on CTV Morning Live, starts her gift list in November. "I like to ask for ideas from the people I'm shopping for to narrow down my choices," said Zigoumis, "but I also love surprising my loved ones with unexpected gifts."

That often means gifts with big price tags. "There are definitely items I think you should splurge on," said Zigoumis, "sunglasses, handbags and electronics, as well as travel." But she adds that her splurge items are well thought out — key to not blowing the bank over the holidays. Here's how Zigoumis manages to be a big spender on a budget.

Lifestyle blogger Loukia Zigoumis. JON NICHOLLS

Style expert Karl Lohnes. AARON HARRIS

Shop early — really early

Don't think of the day after Christmas as Boxing Day. Think of it as the first day of holiday shopping for next year. As Zigoumis points out, you may groan now, but your wallet will thank you later. "After the holidays is a great time to shop for big-ticket items," she said, "whether it's designer goods or electronics as many items will be drastically reduced." Make a note of what you've bought in your personal calendar and then hide it in a spot that you won't forget, she adds.

Make it a long-term investment

Consider splashing out on one "main" gift and keeping any other peripheral gifts small, especially if you have older children. "My boys, now 11 and 8 years old, received iPads a couple of years ago as their main gift," said Zigoumis. "They were great investments as they use them for fun and when they travel. It makes sense to splurge on gifts for loved ones that you know they will love and will last a long time." For herself, Zigoumis says the one big-ticket gift she'd like would be a Louis Vuitton bag. "Designer handbags last forever and the price is easily justified because you know it's going to be used almost daily for years."

Take one for the team

Instead of individual gifts — and the associated shopping time — for each member of your family, consider a big group gift you'd all enjoy. "Perhaps you want to take your family on a tropical vacation during the winter," said Zigoumis. "Maybe everyone's gift can be the plane ticket in a beach bag, along with beach essentials." On the flip side, you could draw names and attach a big budget for the one gift you're getting for just one person.

The trappings of wealth

Even inexpensive gifts can put on pricey airs if the packaging is on the luxe side. "I am big on gift-wrapping presents nicely," said Zigoumis. "One of my favourite things to shop for is gift wrap, ribbons and bows." Those less than skilled at wrapping can take advantage of gift-wrap services within malls and department stores. No one even has to know.

If you want to buy brand-new, top-quality holiday gifts and decor, you'll need to take Karl Lohnes' approach — shop year-round. "In order to be a thrifty shopper of any sort, you have to be willing to shop out of season," said Lohnes, style expert with Toronto's CHUM FM radio.

Need a new artificial Christmas tree? Wait till mid-January. "You'll save at least 60 to 70 per cent of what you'd pay in November," said Lohnes. And the same applies to gifts. "Pick up a beautiful cashmere sweater for half price in February and put it away for next year for your loved one," he added.

Great advice, but what if like many of us, you've just realized that you haven't given a thought to holiday shopping? Fear not: Lohnes has thoughtful, creative gift ideas up his thrifty sleeve.

Go cheap or go home

Embrace your inner penny-pincher, encourage family or friends to do the same, and take on what Lohnes and his friends call "the cheapie challenge."

"You have to shop at a Value Village ... or a second-hand store," he explained, "and you have to find a gift for each person — but leave the price tag on to prove you paid so low." Then, go to town on the wrapping and await each big, cheap reveal.

"You open them up and go, 'An alabaster ashtray from the 1970s!' But actually, it's really cool and — oh my gosh, just $2.99!" At the end of the gathering, decide who was able to give a gift with the most style at the lowest price.

It's make or bake time

We all know people who are exception bakers, sewers and crafters — and what better way to give a thoughtful, affordable gift than to give something you've made?

"To bake somebody something can really mean so much to them — especially if they're not a baker," Lohnes said. "If they're not a knitter, make them a simple scarf. These days, we are all so busy, so it's a thoughtful thing to do."

A little experience goes a long way

Who says a gift has to be a physical object? Sometimes the most welcome present is providing someone your time and service. For example, Lohnes says, you could make a gift certificate offering to walk a loved one's dog for four Saturday mornings so they can sleep in. Or offer to help clean the house of an older parent or friend. Same with a promise to give a manicure or take them shopping — whatever service you know your loved one might need.

The point, says Lohnes, is to think differently about holiday presents."I think that gift-giving has become overwhelming for most people," he said. "There's so much choice and I think we need to put certain challenges into it — turn gifting into experiences. It doesn't mean that you're poor, but it's the idea that there's more thought put into it."

Best apps to save you money while shopping

There are many free downloads from your favourite app store — such as Google Play for Android devices or App Store for iPhone and iPad — that can each help take some weight off your wallet over the holidays. Here are a few favourites.

Flipp

Consider it the ultimate flyer and coupon app. Available for iOS and Android devices, Flipp lets you use your fingertip to flip through retailers that matter to you — whether it's a supermarket, big-box electronics store, clothing chain, home-decor outlet, and so on — and you'll be able to see the latest flyers that showcase new products and sales around you.

Ebates.ca

Saving money is great, but what if you could make money, too? That's the concept behind Ebates.ca, an app and website that pays you cash back every time you shop online through participating retailers — and there are many. Sign up for a free account, and then every time you shop at one of the supported stores or marketplaces — like Amazon.ca, The Gap, Hudson's Bay, eBay, Staples, Microsoft Store, Groupon, and Old Navy, to name a few — you'll start earning cash that can be sent to you via cheque, deposited into a PayPal account, or in the form of an Amazon.ca electronic gift card. The app also offers exclusive deals, as well as sales and coupons, too.

Kijiji

While you can often find a great deal at online marketplaces like Ebay, you'll have to wait for shipping — and the last thing you want is getting a gift into your loved one's hands in January. Instead, online classifieds sites like Kijiji — which is owned by Ebay — lets you buy, sell and trade locally with people, with cash, and you'd be surprised how many new items there are available to wrap as holiday presents. If you're meeting someone to buy a product, try to arrange to do so in a public place, during the day, just to err on the side of caution.

RedFlagDeals

Like its popular website, which caters to 2.5 million monthly readers (says the Yellow Pages-owned company), the RedFlagDeals app sniffs out the best bargains for Canadian shoppers. Featuring retail offers, coupons, flyers, featured items, news and tips, it's all curated by "deal hunters" and wrapped in a clean and easy-to-navigate interface.

MARC SALTZMAN

The Flipp flyer and coupon app. CONTRIBUTED

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Be a wine aficionado this season

Peter Rockwell

With more wines in the world than needles on a Christmas tree, choosing the perfect bottle for those on your holiday gift list can be a challenge.

To simplify your shopping here are 10 tasty wines that will appeal to everyone from the burgeoning aficionado whose just getting into wine to the trendiest person you know.

For the wine newbie

Anciano 2007 '7 Year Old' Tempranillo (Spain): Relaxed and ready-to-drink, this Spaniard is one of the oldest reds on store shelves that's still in everyone's price range. Classically labeled and encased in an old-school gold wire wrap, it's all about mature berry fruit which makes it a perfect out of the box selection for turkey dinners.

Inception 2015 Irresistible White (South Africa): With a Garden of Eden-themed label this white looks sexy and tastes pretty much along the same lines. Big on stone fruit and up-front tropical flavours, it ends surprisingly dry, making it an all-around people pleaser.

Apothic 2014 Inferno (USA): This latest "limited release" in the ever growing Apothic family spends two months in charred, white oak whiskey barrels before being bottled. Though the booze is upfront and personal in the berry-rich aroma and flavour, it mellows itself out when the wine is chilled in the fridge for 10-15 minutes.

For the white wine fan

Kim Crawford 2016 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc Holiday Edition (New Zealand): For wine fans, Sauvignon Blanc is as synonymous with New Zealand as sheep and the All Blacks. Kim Crawford's version from Marlborough is arguably the quintessential example, with its gooseberry fruit and zippy acidity wrapped in gold for the holidays.

Marques de Casa Concha 2014 Chardonnay (Chile): No longer the popularity powerhouse it once was, Chardonnay still holds a place in many hearts, and is proudly served up on holiday tables. This balanced mix of bright fruit and massaging oak has "match with turkey" written all over the label.

For the red wine fan

Meiomi 2014 Pinot Noir (USA): One for those who love a fruit bomb that revels in its not-so-subtle, thick berry flavours. The grapes come from three different regions in California, combining to create a flowing fruit trail that tastes as good on its own as it will with poultry and ham.

Fontanafredda 2011 Barolo DOCG (Italy): While Piedmont may lack Tuscany's sex appeal, its juice, especially what's squeezed from the vineyards around the village of Barolo, are considered wine royalty. Brooding and rustic with layers of Old World personality, Fontanafredda's Barolo is a great introduction to liquid aristocracy.

For the fizz fan

Santa Margherita Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG (Italy): Prosecco is so red hot it has made sparkling wine cool. Best known for its sublime Pinot Grigio, Santa Margherita's spin on this northern Italian sparkler is all about accessible drinkability highlighted by apple and peach aromas and a zesty citrus flavour trail.

Veuve Clicquot Brut Champagne (France): Orange in label and classic in champagne goodness, this Pinot Noir-based bubbly loves to get decked out for the season. This year, it's housed in an arrow tin indicating the distance to Champagne from 29 locations. Look for Montréal; it's the only Canadian city with a shout-out.

For the hipster

Gonzalez Byass Tio Pepe Extra Dry Fino Sherry (Spain): Everything old is new again and sherry, long the tipple of "mature" drinkers, is having a bit of a moment with both mixologists and millennial-aged wine aficionados. Bone dry and best served cold, this fino is surprising food-friendly and will stay fresh for over a week if refrigerated.

Prices reflect the range across the country. Some products may not be available in all locations.

Tasteful gifts for foodies in your life

GOOD EATING

That perfect something for the home chefs on that gift list

Vicky Sanderson

Sure it's better to give to than to receive. It's also true that splurging on a gift for your favourite home cook could be an investment in good eating. Here are a few items that might serve the amateur chef and gift-giver equally well.

Blenders don't always get the respect they deserve as small-footprint appliances that do everything from blend soups to make mayonnaise to chop nuts and herbs.

Chefs, who are also connoisseurs of mid-century or small-space design, might like one from Smeg, the Italian manufacturer of compact, curved countertop appliances in a rainbow of colours. A Smeg blender, in a cheery seasonal red, is available at Lowe's, lowes.ca, for $349.

Brand new this year is Panasonic's Countertop Induction Oven, which uses induction and infrared heating to create what has been described as a toaster oven on steroids. There's almost no preheat time; in minutes, it's up to 450°F. That's hot enough to grill whole fish quickly with a crisp skin and flaky, moist interior. A one-pan chicken and veg meal can be done in about 20 minutes.

The non-stick pan that must be used with it is dishwasher safe, and each unit comes with a cookbook of recipes developed by the Culinary Institute of America. Available at major retailers and on Panasonic's eStore, the manufacturer's suggested price is $700.

Home chefs who already love Le Creuset's line of enameled cast-iron wear might covet the Dutch Oven in a zippy Tartan pattern exclusive to Williams Sonoma, williams-sonoma.com, for $550. Purists who insist on solids will be better pleased with exclusive grey, white or dark blue options. (Psst: A more affordable idea is a simple cast iron pan, a favourite of many chefs. Walmart sells a Lodge 6.5-inch pan for $1.)

Fresh herbs take any dish from average to outstanding. They are much easier to incorporate if the kitchen includes a unit from AeroGarden, which makes economically-sized indoor garden kits with full-spectrum grow lights and hydroponic, soil-free containers. Recent sale prices at aerogarden.com began at about $100.

The slow cooker has long been loved by home cooks. It's perfect for anything that benefits from lengthy cooking at low temperature, such as stews, stocks and cheaper cuts of meat. It also does soups, yogurt, pudding, grain dishes, and jams.

There are lots of versions of this versatile cookware, but the granddaddy of them all, CrockPot, has a clever new design twist. The Multi CrockPot comes with a 2.5- split, a four-, and a six- quart crock. When not in use, they nest for compact storage. About $100 from Bed Bath & Beyond, bedbathandbeyond.ca.

Le Creuset's Dutch Oven in Tartan. LE CREUSET

Güde Chef's Knife. LEE VALLEY TOOLS

A vacuum packer is a very efficient way to preserve food. So a chef can buy larger amounts of perishable foods, such as cheese, when it's on sale and/or available and use it reliably for a couple of months to come. It also seals make-ahead meals for road or camping trips, and busy weeknights.

Hamilton Beach has come out with NutriFresh, a vacuum sealer with settings for moist, dry and delicate foods, which are sealed in bags made of refillable, BPA-free plastic rolls. About $130 at multiple retailers and online at hamiltonbeach.ca.

Adventurous chefs will want to try the sealer to cook sous-vide, in which vacuum-sealed food cooks under gently circulating water at very low, very precise temperatures for a very long time — 24 hours or more. The advantages are virtually no volume loss, and excellent texture; the long, slow cooking apparently also makes magic out of tougher cuts of meat.

To do it, the cook will also need something like the Nomiku immersion circulator. About the size of a hand blender, it clips on to any pot, and handles the temp and circulation. It sells for $549 from Nella, nellaonline.com. Look for other, perhaps less expensive brands, at Amazon.ca.

Good knives are the foundation to a functioning kitchen. Knife nerds would be delighted to receive the Güde Chef's Knife from Lee Valley Tools, leevalley.com.

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Gear up: New gaming hardware is here

NEW MACHINES

From next-generation consoles to virtual reality, amp up your entertainment

Marc Saltzman

Are you looking to get your game on in 2017? Get your thumbs ready. New versions of popular video game consoles are now available, not to mention cutting-edge virtual reality (VR) headsets to drop you "in" the game.

Expect these hardware platforms to be hot sellers over the holidays as more and more games are playable on them.

Here's a look at what's new and newsworthy.

PS4 Pro

Available for $499.99, the new and improved PlayStation 4 (PS4) console trumps its three-year-old predecessor. For one, it now supports 4K TVs — those new televisions with four times the resolution of 1080p HD — and offers HDR ("high dynamic range"), which reproduces a wider range of brightness levels, richer colours, and higher contrast levels. Even older games are now "up-scaled" to deliver more breath-takingly detailed graphics. And PS4 Pro also supports apps including Netflix and YouTube, both of which can display 4K video. This new black box also offers a faster processor for faster and smoother frame rates in your games, and the hard drive has doubled, from 500 gigabytes to 1 terabyte, so it can hold more content.

Xbox One S

Xbox has also undergone a significant makeover. Xbox One S — the "S" stands for "Slim" — is smallest and most compact Xbox yet, and also works well with new 4K TVs. In fact, along with supporting 4K games and streaming video services, Xbox One S can also play 4K Blu-ray discs, as well as regular Blu-rays and DVDs (PlayStation 4 Pro plays Blu-ray discs and DVDs, but not 4K discs). You also get 2 terabytes of storage for the price. With a starting price of $379 (500GB version), Xbox One S offers backward compatibility, therefore you can play a growing number of older Xbox 360 games at no additional cost.

HTC Vive

The most comprehensive solution for virtual reality buffs, HTC Vive ($1149.99) ships with a comfortable VR headset with twin high-resolution screens, and a built-in camera for when you need to see around you; two room-scale base stations that track your movement in a 3-D play space (no, you don't just sit down with HTC Vive); and two wireless controllers that let you interface with content. Speaking of content, the Valve VR store now has more than 700 PC downloads supported by HTC Vive, plus you get two games for free: a fantasy adventure called The Gallery: Call of the Starseed, and the fast and frantic, Zombie Training Simulator.

Oculus Rift

Purchased by Facebook for $2 billion dollars — yes, billion with a "b" — Oculus Rift ($849) also plugs into a compatible personal computer, like HTC Vive, and delivers an immersive 360-degree experience with VR games, movies, educational software, and more — including many exclusive titles you won't find anywhere else. Packed up with the headset is a Xbox One controller, but Oculus Touch is now available, for $279.99 for the pair, for a more engaging interactive entertainment experience. One of the dozens of launch titles for Oculus Rift, Farlands lets gamers explore an uncharted planet and discover new forms of life (including insects, fish and plants), while Lucky's Tale, included, is a fun platforming adventure.

PlayStation VR

Debuting in October, PlayStation VR ($549.99) works exclusively with the PlayStation 4 video game console for your TV. Set-up is a breeze, as you simply plug the gear into the PS4, mount the PlayStation Camera ($74.99) just below or above the television, and don the head mounted display (HMD) and earbuds, to be transported to virtual worlds. With a strong focus on gaming, PlayStation VR launched with a lineup of 30 games, including exclusive titles such as Batman: Arkham VR, PlayStation Worlds, Rez Infinite, DRIVECLUB VR and RIGS Mechanized Combat League.

Samsung Gear VR

Another player is the newly refreshed Samsung Gear VR ($139.99), which requires one of six compatible Samsung smartphones to experience virtual reality, by popping the phone inside the headset. Supported devices include Samsung Galaxy S6, S6 edge, S6 edge+, Galaxy Note5, Galaxy S7, and Galaxy S7 edge. After you insert your phone, you can run games and apps by touching a small trackpad and buttons on the right of the headset or via an optional Bluetooth controller, if you like.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: XBOX ONE S; SAMSUNG GEAR VR; HTC VIVE; PLAYSTATION VR; OCULUS RIFT; PS4 PRO

Get your game on with these picks

VIDEO GAMES

Here are some thumb-numbing suggestions

Marc Saltzman

Whether you're into sci-fi shooters, role-playing games, sports simulations or head-scratching puzzlers, 2016 served up a ton of selection and quality for the discerning gamer.

In fact, therein lies the problem: With so many games released each year — for consoles, computers and handheld devices — it can be tricky to know what to buy. If you need some suggestions, the following are some top games of the year, divided into kids, teens and adults, costing $69.99 apiece unless otherwise specified.

EA Sports' NHL 17. CONTRIBUTED

Naughty Dog's Uncharted. CONTRIBUTED

Kids

• Hit the ice with **EA Sports' NHL 17** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One), a fun and frantic hockey sim that delivers the goods. Along with playing as or against your favourite NHL team, this disc or download offers more accessible and responsive skating and shooting controls, smarter goaltending, new modes (Draft Champions and World Cup of Hockey), a deep progression system, new animations and stadium art, and better commentary to get you pumped up while you play. NHL 17 is also the most customizable game to date, and features dozens of thrilling new goal celebrations.

• As with its popular predecessors, **Skylanders Imaginators** once again fuses action figures with a video game: simply place the character on the Portal of Power, connected to a game console, and the character comes alive on the TV screen — but now there's a lot more customization. Along with an all-new story, kids can create their own Skylanders for the first time, by tweaking their in-game appearance, powers, abilities, catch phrases, and more. Available for all major platforms, the $89.99 Starter Pack includes a couple of characters, magical crystal, sticker sheet, Portal of Power, and the game.

Teens

• Who said all first-person shooters need to be super violent? Rated "Teen," Blizzard's colourful and cartoon-like **Overwatch** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Windows PC) pits two teams against one another in fast-paced, objective-based matches in the future. Featuring a roster of diverse characters — including soldiers, scientists, and adventurers — your team will unleash extraordinary powers, traverse the globe, and even speed up and slow down time. Use strategy, tactics and reflexes to survive the fight.

• If car racing is more your thing, Microsoft Studios' **Forza Horizon 3** is an open-world racing video game that supports cross-platform play between Xbox One and Windows 10 players. Based in Australia, the game is roughly twice as big as Forza Horizon 2, and includes locations such as Surfers Paradise, Yarra Valley, and the Outback. More than 350 cars are available — the most in a Forza game — and along with various solo and competitive multiplayer modes, Forza Horizon 3 also features a four-player co-operative ("co-op") multiplayer campaign.

• After selling more than 110 million Final Fantasy games since 1987, Square Enix is back with a new installment in the coveted role-playing game series: **Final Fantasy XV** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One) fuses a real-time battle system with memorable characters and a gripping story that tells of Crown Prince Noctis who bands with companions to push back against an invading army. Many years in development, this epic single-player game features an open-world environment and cinematic graphics.

Adults

• Available for Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and Windows PC, **Electronic Arts' Battlefield 1** challenges you to climb into the boots of a solider and battle over land, sea and air in a large-scale action game set against the backdrop of The Great War.

Up to 64 players can use WWI-era weapons and vehicles — including massive air ships, battleships, or an armoured train — and experience white-knuckle combat scenarios with dynamic elements to ensure no two battles will be the same.

• Exclusively available for PlayStation 4, **Naughty Dog's Uncharted 4: A Thief's End** once again stars treasure hunter Nathan Drake — and other returning characters — in a large-scale, third-person and action-heavy adventure. Along with tight and responsive controls, this game delivers near photorealistic graphics, convincing voice-acting, a great story, and many memorable moments.

Learn a thing or two on teacher gifts

CLASS IN SESSION

Here are some bright ideas straight from the source

Astrid Van Den Broek

When it comes to giving teachers memorable gifts for the holidays, you know the cranberry-and-cinnamon-scented candle you gave your child's Grade 2 teacher probably didn't make her list of favourite gifts ever.

So what do teachers prefer to receive? Any hints on how to pick the perfect gift for your child's equally perfect teacher? Here are four to give us the scoop on their favourite presents.

PICTURE FRAME, MARSHALLS

CORKCICLE TUMBLER – COPPER, INDIGO.CA

Alyssa Greenberg
Grade 7/8 French Immersion teacher
École Stanley Knowles School, Winnipeg

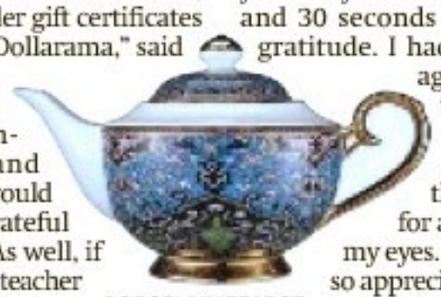
"One of my students once presented me with a concert ticket for an artist we both really liked," said Greenberg. "The card included a message from her indicating that she had the other ticket and really wanted to enjoy the concert with me. Though it was a bit unconventional — I don't know many students who want to hang out with their teachers outside of school — this was really a memorable experience for me."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "It's always nice for students to notice teacher's interests and choose a gift card that would suit their needs," said Greenberg. For example, Greenberg's students have picked up the fact that she's a baker (she often bakes for her students at Christmas). "So I've often received baking supplies and small kitchen gadgets that have been put to good use."

Heather Webb Makin
Teacher/Librarian
Eastview Public School, Toronto

"As crazy as it sounds, one of the best and unexpected gifts was a cocktail blender. I was teaching Kindergarten at the time and there were just some days I could have used it during the school year," said Webb Makin. "I now use it for cocktails in the summer, as well as smoothies throughout the school year. I totally didn't know I needed one until I got it."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "Most teachers, as you know, buy a ton of supplies for their own classrooms, maybe consider gift certificates at Staples or Dollarama," said Webb Makin. "These would be used immediately and the teacher would be forever grateful for that gift. As well, if you know the teacher has a class iPad or Android device to use in the classroom, a gift card to buy an app would not only help the teacher, but most likely your child in the long run."



PORCELAIN TEAPOT, HOMESENSE

Jennifer Sepetdjian
Grade 2 teacher
On a teaching exchange at Glendal Primary School, Glen Waverley, Australia

"When I left my fabulous Grade 1 class in Canada back in December 2015, I got the best gift," said Sepetdjian.

BUFFALO PLAID SCARF, WINNERS

"The class parents and students put together a video of the kids answering questions about me and passing on some wise advice for my year away. It was eight minutes and 30 seconds of complete gratitude. I had to watch it again at home that night as I had missed so much of it that afternoon for all the tears in my eyes. I've never felt so appreciated in my 16 years of teaching."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "I suggest parents get their child to choose what to purchase. Those kids know that Mrs. A loves coffee, that Ms. J loves to travel or that Mr. D loves to garden and they will be so excited to present the gift to their teacher," said Sepetdjian. "If not, something from a local restaurant, gift card to a shopping centre, tickets to the movies, books for the class, time at the "pick an item and paint it" kind of shop and there isn't anything wrong with the LCBO (liquor store)!"

Miranda Tonery
Grade 9 teacher
St. Francis of Assisi Middle School, Red Deer, Alta.

"The best gifts have been the ones that came from the heart. There was a parent who was very creative, and she made Christmas balls with the initials of every member of the family each on their own ornament," said Tonery.

"I also had student paint a silhouette picture of my family in a sunset on a canvas."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "The best gifts have been the ones that came from the heart. However, large group gifts of a spa day is always nice as well."

GIFT IDEAS

1. Desk Set
HomeSense, $24.99
2. Buffalo Plaid Scarf
Winners, $24.99
3. L'Occitane Shea Butter Ultra Rich Body Lotion
Amazon.ca, $39
4. Metal Lunch Tins
HomeSense, $14.99 each
5. Tree Line Photo Pillow Cover
Indigo, Indigo.ca, $39.50
6. Corkcicle Tumbler – Copper
Indigo, Indigo.ca, $38
7. S'well Marble 17oz Insulated Water bottle
Indigo, Indigo.ca, $45
8. Picture Frame
Marshalls, $12.99
9. Superman 1,000 Piece Jigsaw Puzzle
Marshalls, $9.99
10. Porcelain Teapot
HomeSense, $19.99
*Prices may vary

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Your essential daily news

Pitbull releases details of his $1M U.S. deal with Visit Florida after House speaker sued for details

Boutique stays in Tel Aviv

For decades, the tourist landscape in Tel Aviv was dominated by mediocre beachfront hotels. Over the last several years, beautiful boutique properties have changed the city's hospitality scene and contributed to Tel Aviv's increasingly chic image. These accommodations are sleeker, smaller and often-affordable. **SARAH TRELEAVEN/FOR METRO**

MIDTOWN

Brown Beach House

This property is perfect for visitors looking for a hip and affordable small beachside hotel in an increasingly sophisticated part of the city. The giant neon pink flamingo out front and the sunny yellow furnishings set a playful tone. Some rooms have enormous ocean-facing balconies, and all have bright yellow or blue accents. The neighbourhood is ideal for exploring both the south of the city (hipper) and the north (more polished).

ALLENBY AND ROTHSCHILD

Hotel Montefiore

The original boutique beachhead is the Montefiore, which opened in 2008 and sits on a quiet side street. The Montefiore is all grace and discretion. The lobby restaurant — a fusion menu offering terrific pork and cabbage gyoza and wonderfully rich truffled goat cheese ravioli — is full of palm fronds and Art Deco light fixtures. The hotel's bedrooms are equally elegant, and in-room libraries offer a great selection of authors.

STEPS FROM ROTHSCHILD BOULEVARD

The Norman

The Norman is comprised of two 1920s buildings that still retain their original grandeur. The palette of creams and soft greys is complemented by Bauhaus and Art Deco touches. This 50-room hotel serves Mediterranean and Japanese cuisine, and showcases work by Israeli artists. Further cultural enrichment is provided through bespoke tours, including food tours of the Carmel Market and historic perspectives on Jaffa.

CENTRAL TEL AVIV

The Poli House

Canadian Karim Rashid is the designer responsible for The Poli House – the high-design (pod chairs, neon) new property that opened its doors in November. This stunning boutique hotel was carved out of a 1934 Bauhaus wonder in central Tel Aviv, and is the product of a three-year modernization process that remained loyal to the building's heritage. The focus of this 40-room property is a massive panoramic rooftop space with an infinity pool, cocktail bar and tapas menu. There's also a ground floor "cultural centre," complete with gallery space and design bookstore.

5 HOTTEST DESTINATIONS FOR TRAVEL IN 2017

Want to travel in the new year, but still not sure exactly where you're headed? Perhaps this list can help. From the in-your backyard destinations to the far, far away, here are some of the world's must-see destinations in 2017.

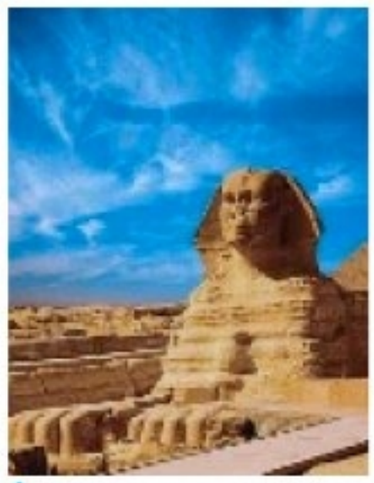
LOREN CHRISTIE/FOR METRO

1 Portugal

Due to cheap hotel rates and mouth-watering cuisine Portugal has risen to the top of many travellers' lists. Air Transat is increasing its direct flight service from Montreal and Toronto to both Porto and Lisbon and Air Canada Rouge is adding new flights to the Portuguese capital in summer 2017. For foodies, Exodus Travels has launched a collection of guilt-free vacations for people who want to hike, eat and drink their way through Portugal's Douro Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its award-winning wine.

2 Iceland

Thanks to its' stunning and varied natural beauty and a series of viral ad campaigns Iceland continues to be a top draw. Research by youth travel operator Contiki has revealed that the most desired travel experience for 18-35 year olds in Canada is to bathe in Iceland's famous Blue Lagoon.



3 Egypt

G Adventures reports an eight percent increase in travellers year over year heading to Egypt. Although numbers aren't what they were pre-revolution, it's a great time to visit some of the world's most historic monuments while avoiding the crowds and helping this former tourism giant get back on its feet.

4 Cambodia

A recent survey by Booking.com ranks Cambodia as a top pick for 2017. The recent discovery of an ancient city below the stunning temple complex of Angkor Wat has further heightened interest among Canadians. Before you go check out First They Killed My Father, a biography about the Cambodian genocide.

5 Canada

With the 150th anniversary of Confederation taking place there's never been a better time to explore at home. The epicentre of action will be the nation's capital with more than 150 events planned, but there will be plenty going on elsewhere, with national parks waving entrance fees and Montreal celebrating its 375th.

Riu Jalisco
★★★★Plus
Riviera Nayarit, Mexico
Jan 07, 2017
7 Nights
All Inclusive
$765
+ $415 taxes (SWG)

Grand Memories Santa Maria
★★★★Plus
Cayo Santa Maria, Cuba
Jan 11, 2017
7 Nights
All Inclusive
$785
+ $386 taxes (SWG)

Royalton Riviera Cancun Resort & Spa ★★★★★
Riviera Maya, Mexico
Jan 04, 2017
7 Nights
All Inclusive
*Perfect for Families
$1505
+ $415 taxes (SWG)

CHIC Punta Cana
★★★★★
Punta Cana, D.R
Feb 02, 2017
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All Inclusive
*Adults only All-Exclusive™ for social vacations
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+ $470 taxes (SWG)

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metro SPORTS

Christine Sinclair has been named Canada's women's soccer player of the year for the 13th time in 17 years

Coach's job security back in question

CANUCKS

Players back Desjardins amid slump

The hot seat is nothing new for Willie Desjardins.

The under-fire head coach of the Vancouver Canucks looked to be in trouble with his team mired in an ugly nine-game losing streak earlier this season before a subsequent 7-4-1 stretch cooled talk of his immediate job security.

But after a demoralizing 1-4-0 road trip culminated in Tuesday's stunning 8-6 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes in which the Canucks led 5-2 heading into the third period, the pressure is back on.

"That was the same story a month ago," Desjardins said Thursday when asked how he's dealing with the situation. "Our focus a month ago was what we're going to do and how we're going to do it. Nothing's changed. That's the way you approach every game.

"I won't worry about (getting fired). It's out of my control. Why worry about it?"

With the team sitting 28th in the overall standings, fans seething and plenty of talk in the local media about Desjardins' future, the players know it's on them to silence the critics.

"You hear different things, but we're a family in this room," said Canucks centre Bo Horvat. "Willie's been so great for me and for this team and for the organization. We want to play hard for him. We don't want to see anything happen."

Willie Desjardins and the Canucks went 1-4-0 on a road trip that was capped by an 8-6 loss in Carolina on Tuesday night. THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE

Desjardins guided the Canucks (12-16-2) to a 101-point campaign in 2014-15, but the club slipped to 28th last season as it started to rebuild and has struggled most of this year with just five regulation wins through 30 games.

"We just feel pressure as a team overall," said defenceman Luca Sbisa. "Everyone's job is on the line. A player can get traded any day. Everyone is accountable. We're not looking for outside help.

"The quality's here. We just have to find a way to make it work."

Vancouver captain Henrik Sedin said rebounding from that previous 0-8-1 slide served as an indication then the club still believed in Desjardins, and nothing has changed.

"It's not the first time we've faced that pressure this year," said Sedin. "It showed the last time around a couple weeks back when we came back and played really well that we enjoy playing for him."

The Canucks will look to pick themselves off the floor on Friday when they host the Tampa Bay Lightning (15-13-2) to open a four-game homestand.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

> **We can't worry about what another team brings. We have to worry about what we bring and what we do.** Willie Desjardins

HOCKEY

Canadian juniors low on star power

Without an obvious star player to carry the pressure and expectations, Canada's team for the world junior hockey championship will be all about teamwork, speed and desire.

The final 22-man roster that emerged from this week's four-day selection camp in Boisbriand, Que., is deep in very good players, such as 2015 third overall NHL draft pick Dylan Strome and Ontario Hockey League scoring leader Taylor Raddysh, but doesn't have a Connor McDavid or a John Tavares to claim the spotlight.

"We want to be a complete team," said coach Dominique Ducharme, the Drummondville Voltigeurs coach and general manager who led the Halifax Mooseheads to the 2013 Memorial Cup. "We've got speed, skill.

"We're reliable. We can defend. We're good at putting pressure on the other team. We want to put all that together."

The heat will be on Canada after a quarter-final elimination from last year's world junior event by host Finland.

And this year the stakes may be higher in Montreal and Toronto, where Canada won gold two years ago. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Dylan Strome GETTY IMAGES

OBITUARY

Beloved reporter Sager dies at 65

Craig Sager, the longtime NBA sideline reporter famous for his flashy suits and probing questions, has died after a battle with cancer, Turner Sports announced Thursday. He was 65.

Turner president David Levy said in a statement Thursday that Sager had died, without saying when or where.

Sager worked basketball games for TNT for nearly a quarter-century.

He announced in April 2014 that he had been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, and he missed the playoffs and much of the following season as he underwent two bone marrow transplants. He revealed in March 2016 that his leukemia was no longer in remission.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Craig Sager GETTY IMAGES

Tyler Lockett of the Seahawks had 130 yards receiving and a touchdown on Thursday night. GETTY IMAGES

NFL

Seahawks take NFC West title

Russell Wilson threw three touchdown passes, Tyler Lockett had 130 yards receiving and a score, and the Seattle Seahawks won the NFC West title with a 24-3 victory over the Los Angeles Rams on Thursday night.

Seattle claimed its third NFC West title in four seasons, assuring itself of at least one home game in the playoffs and keeping the pressure on Detroit in the competition for the No. 2 seed in the NFC and a first-round bye. Seattle also snapped a three-game losing streak to the Rams.

It wasn't an impressive display by Seattle (9-4-1), but was far better than Sunday when the Seahawks were blown out by Green Bay with Wilson throwing five interceptions.

THURSDAY In Seattle

SEAHAWKS	RAMS
24	3

Wilson was good enough against the listless Rams. After slogging through the first half, Wilson threw a one-yard touchdown pass to Doug Baldwin late in the third quarter for a 17-3 lead, then put the game away on a 57-yard touchdown strike to Lockett on the second play of the fourth quarter.

Wilson finished 19 of 26 for 229 yards, but also threw a careless interception at the goal-line midway through the fourth quarter. Seven of those passes went to Lockett, whose previous career high was 104 yards. Luke Wilson also had an eight-yard TD catch in the first half.

Rams QB Jared Goff was 13 of 25 for 135 yards before leaving in the fourth quarter to be checked for a possible concussion. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Major League Soccer plans to expand to 28 teams

Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber announced plans Thursday for the league's expansion to 28 teams, including a deadline for owners to apply and a new franchise fee.

The fee for the two teams expected to be granted next year is jumping to $150 million. Garber also set a Jan. 31, 2017, deadline for interested potential owners or ownership groups to apply.

The league recently expanded to 22 teams.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Top Euro clubs unite against expanded World Cup

FIFA has found a difficult opponent to president Gianni Infantino's plan to expand the World Cup to 48 teams.

A group of 220 of Europe's top clubs called on Infantino on Thursday not to increase the tournament from its 32-team format.

The European Club Association said the number of games played each season "has already reached an unacceptable level."

Infantino wants 48 teams at the 2026 World Cup.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

B.C. pair first sisters to play for Canada

The Potomak sisters, Sarah and Amy, will wear the Maple Leaf in the women's hockey series versus the United States.
THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO-HOCKEY CANADA, JOSEPH LEUNG

HOCKEY

Amy and Sarah Potomak will take on the U.S. in 2-game series

A wave of players from Canada's most westerly province has hit the national women's hockey team. Two are from the same family.

Sarah and Amy Potomak of Aldergrove, B.C., will wear the Maple Leaf in Canada's two-game series against the United States starting Saturday in Plymouth, Mich. The second game is Monday in Sarnia, Ont.

The Potomak (pronounced POT-oh-mack) forwards and defenceman Micah Hart of Saanichton represent a veritable explosion of players from British Columbia, which has been under-represented on the Canadian women's team for years.

Goaltender Daniele Dube is the only B.C. player to appear in a women's world championship more than two decades ago.

Sarah, who turns 19 on Monday, and 17-year-old Amy will be the first sisters to play on the national team together.

"There's no words to describe how awesome this feeling is," Amy said. Added Sarah: "It's kind of surreal. We've played together since we were little and stuff and always dreamed about being on the national team together, but we never really thought that would happen.

"The fact that will actually happen, playing against the U.S. together is pretty special."

> **There's no words to describe how awesome this feeling is.**
> Amy Potomak

Sarah is a shifty, abrasive forward with a sense of occasion. She has already scored five game winners for the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers this season.

Three inches taller and almost 10 pounds heavier than her older sister, Amy proved at Canada's fall camp she can think and skate at national team speed, according to Melody Davidson, Hockey Canada's general manager of national women's teams programs.

Sarah signalled B.C.'s drought on the national squad was ending when she was named to Canada's roster for the 2015 Four Nations Cup.

"We've definitely helped each other a lot," Amy said. "We've always been really good at holding each other accountable and training together and practising the right things. "I think she's helped me probably more so than I've helped her because she's older and she went through it first and always lent me a hand." The Potomaks will wear the Canadian jersey multiple times over the next month.

Sarah was also named to the Canadian women's under-22 squad competing Jan. 4-7 in the Nations Cup in Fussen, Germany, and Telfs, Austria.

Amy will play for Canada in the world under-18 championship Jan. 7-15 in the Czech Republic. Hart, Erin Ambrose of Keswick, Ont., Halli Krzyzaniak of Neepawa, Man., Jillian Saulnier of Halifax and Saskatoon's Emily Clark join Sarah doing double duty for Canada in the U.S. series and with the under-22 squad.

Saskatoon forward Sophie Shirley, who makes her national team debut in the U.S. series, will also join Amy on the under-18 team. This cross-pollination of rosters helps Davidson determine who is ready to play in the 2017 women's world championship and also who gets invited to try out for the Olympic team next year.

"This will be the last chance to see all three programs in best-on-best kind of thing before we have to make world championship decisions and then leading into centralization," Davidson said.

The women invited to try out for the Olympic team will be announced shortly after the world championship April 1-8 in Plymouth.

They'll congregate in Calgary in late summer and spend half a year preparing to defend the gold in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Canada is 1-7 versus the U.S. since beating them 3-2 in overtime in the 2014 Olympic final.
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MAKE IT TONIGHT

Satisfying Avocado, Lettuce and Tomato sandwich

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

Forget the bacon because you don't need it! Ok, don't give us that side-eye because the ALT is as satisfying as your diner classic thanks to sweet basil. Trust us.

Ready in 10 minutes
Prep time: 5 minutes
Serves 2

Ingredients
4 basil leaves, torn
1/2 avocado, pitted and mashed
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1 tomato
1 teaspoon olive oil
1/2 a head of Boston bibb lettuce
4 pieces of multi grain bread, toasted
sea salt

Directions

1. Cut tomato and lay out on a plate. Coat with olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt. Let stand.

2. Meanwhile, mash avocado in a medium bowl and then add lemon juice and torn basil. Mix until smooth.

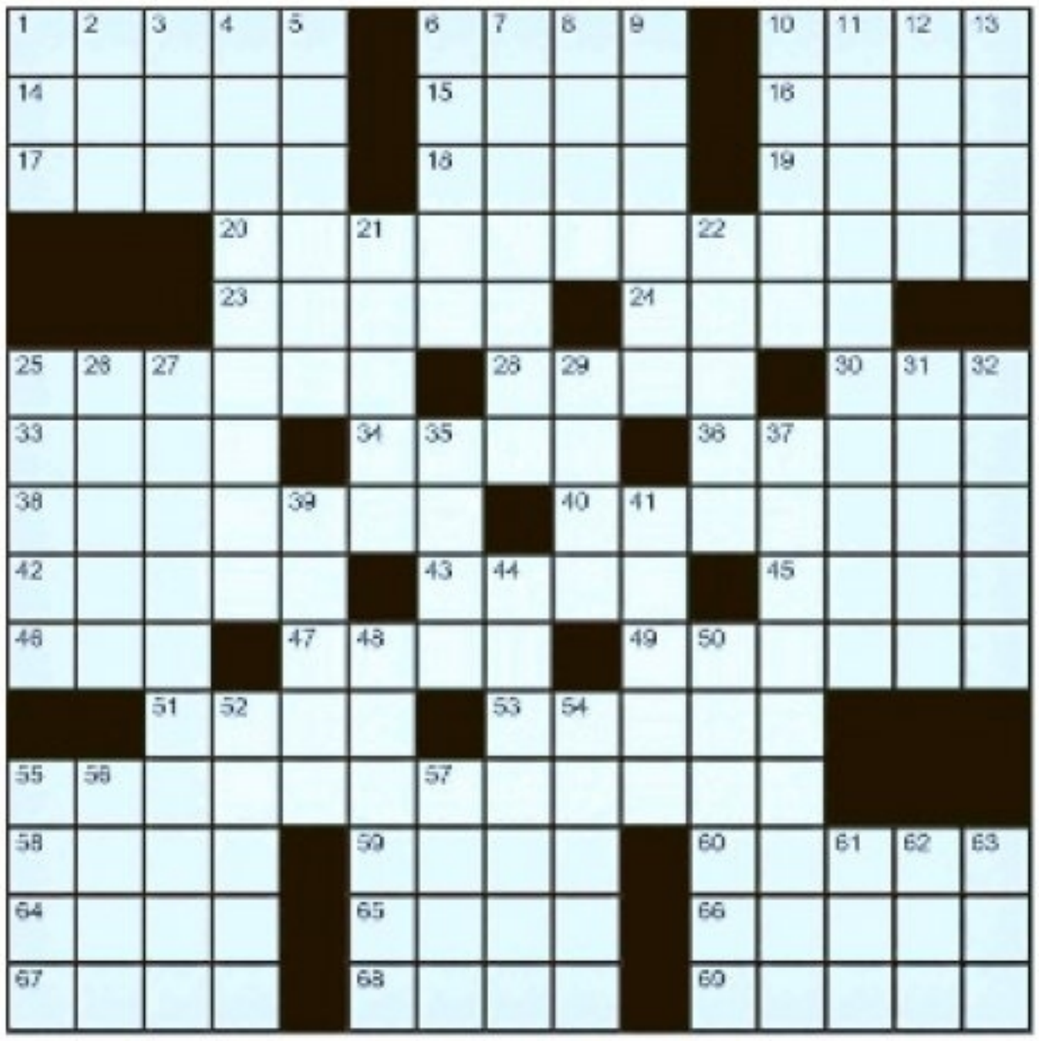
3. Toast bread and then smear about a tablespoon and a half of the avocado spread onto the bread. Finish by adding tomato slices and a few pieces of lettuce.

4. Cut in half or in quarters and serve with some cucumber slices.

FOR MORE MEAL IDEAS, VISIT SWEETPOTATOCHRONICLES.COM

CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. Australian actor Mr. Bana's
6. "Sure __ standing here..."
10. Ladies
14. "Well, obviously, Sherlock!": 2 wds.
15. Ms. Rowlands of "The Notebook" (2004)
16. Prefix to 'matic'
17. Mouthwash brand
18. Car rental company
19. River of Russia
20. Make the best of a fierce Winter day all bundled up in a toque, scarf and mittens: 3 wds.
23. "Do you have a pencil __ I can burrow?"
24. All square
25. King Arthur's nephew Knight
28. Julie Harris' role in "East of Eden" (1955)
30. Initials-sharers of Emilio Estevez's actor brother
33. Roman love god
34. "Sesame Street" character
36. Stage stuff
38. Ontario town; or, Ms. Lohan
40. Maneuvered the motor vehicle
42. "Then...?": 2 wds.
43. Wealthy
45. Canvas for a survey
46. Check/determine
47. Starring role
49. Housing market
51. Staircase support
53. __ glue
55. #27-Down's answer is a what?: 2 wds.
58. Slightly open
59. Ballerina's garb
60. Apollo, for one
64. Blight
65. Util. bill
66. Bestow with a trait
67. Comedian Mr. Caesar's
68. Office table
69. Pre-weddings parties

DOWN
1. N nn N and N and n
2. Bird of myth
3. Nuptials vow: 2 wds.
4. Dishes/glasses storage areas
5. TV personality Ms. Shepherd
6. Tequila plant source
7. Time to catch the early train during the work week, e.g.: 2 wds.
8. "Put a sock __!"
9. Utensil for preparing potatoes
10. Soya __
11. Canadian song on #27-Down: 2 wds.
12. And others, for short: 2 wds.
13. Purchased, in another word
21. Sleeping problem
22. Sidestep
25. Posh parties
26. "Oh My Darling, Clementine" part: "... excavating for __..."
27. Sarah McLachlan's new release featuring classic Christmas tunes
29. Pear variety
31. Extract metal from ore
32. Woefully
35. Vega constellation
37. Quittance
39. Strong
41. Ache a lot
44. Conceptualizes
48. Joyful
50. Projects positivity, perhaps
52. Buenos __ (Capital of Argentina)
54. __ the guitar strings
55. Montreal hockey players, to fans
56. Bionic Woman's hometown in California
57. Candy canes time
61. Mount __ (Peak of Crete)
62. __-of-war
63. Greenlight reply

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS Your daily horoscope by Francis Drake

Aries March 21 - April 20
Grab every chance to travel, because you need a change of scenery. Likewise, you will love to learn something new if you take a course or study something unusual.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
You can make headway clearing up loose details about shared property, inheritances, taxes and debt. Just roll up your sleeves and dig in. Now is the time!

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You can learn a lot about your style of relating to friends, spouses and partners at this time. Observe your style of dealing with those who are closest to you.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You have a lot of stuff, and anything you do to help you feel better organized is a good thing. What can you do today to make your life run more smoothly?

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
You want to play and take time off from drudgery, even if it's just catching a game or going out for dinner or seeing a movie. You need some fun!

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Because you will likely earn more money soon, this is a good time to think about how you can make home repairs. You also might be focused on a parent more than usual.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
This is a busy time for you, because short trips, reading, writing and talking to everyone will keep you on the go. Enjoy this accelerated pace.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
It's important to know what your money scene is. How much do you own? How much do you make? How much do you owe? Information is power.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Make the most of this time with three planets are in your sign. It's easy to attract positive situations now, which means you can come out on top.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You might want to hide for a few days, because you're not ready to step out into the world. When your birthday arrives, things will be different.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Enjoy your popularity with others now. Probably more than any other sign in the zodiac, friendships mean a lot to you.

Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
Because you look so good to bosses and VIPs, use this time to go after what you want. Promote your own agenda. Speak up.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

					7			
		8		1			3	
	7	1	4			9		
		5		8	1			3
	6						2	
2			3	9		4		
		6			8	1	5	
	2			5		6		
			7					

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

Your daily crossword and Sudoku answers from the play page.

for more fun and games go to metronews.ca/games

5	7	9	1	8	6	3	2	4
6	4	3	7	2	9	8	1	5
1	8	2	4	3	5	7	6	9
8	2	6	5	1	4	9	7	3
4	5	7	9	6	3	2	8	1
3	9	1	8	7	2	5	4	6
2	1	4	3	9	7	6	5	8
7	3	5	6	4	8	1	9	2
9	6	8	2	5	1	4	3	7

TAKE ADVANTAGE AND SAVE $$$'S FROM OUR PRE-

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LOWEST PRICES OF THE YEAR ON QUALITY USED VEHICLES! EASY FINANCING!

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POWER GROUP, A/C,
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HATCHBACK, GT, AUTOMATIC,
A/C, AIR CONDITION,
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2012 MITSUBISHI RVR
ALL WHEEL DRIVE, 2.4L
ENGINE, AUTO, A/C,
69200 EASY KM !

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54900A

2011 CHRYSLER 200
TOURING, CONVERTIBLE,
EATHER, V6, STUNNING !
32000 KM !

$17,995

35335A

2013 LINCOLN MKZ
HYBRID, HEATED LEATHER
SEATING, NAVIGATION,
MOONROOF, ONLY 45000 KMS !

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54611A

2012 MERCEDES C250
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ALLOYS, NAVIGATION, ONLY
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54896A

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7 PASSENGER, ONLY 43000
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$27,979

54601A

2013 BMW 328I
XDRIVE, SPORTS PACKAGE, AUTO,
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LEATHER, MOONROOF, NAVIGATION,
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Jan 23, 30
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Cayo Santa Maria
Hotel Cayo Santa Maria 4★
Jan 9, 23
$739 + $332 txs/fees

Puerto Vallarta
Hacienda Buenaventura Hotel Spa & Beach Club 3★
Jan 30, Feb 1, 3, 15
$779 + $398 txs/fees

Puerto Vallarta
Las Palmas by the Sea 3★
Ocean View Room
Jan 20
$799 + $398 txs/fees

$999 & under

Santo Domingo*
Bellevue Dominican Bay 3★
Dec 30
$869 + $441 txs/fees

Los Cabos
Holiday Inn Resort Los Cabos 4★
Jan 14
$899 + $404 txs/fees

Puerto Vallarta
Villas Vallarta by Canto del Sol 3★
Dec 31
$899 + $398 txs/fees

Varadero
SuperClubs Breezes Varadero 4★
Feb 6, 13, 20
$999 + $332 txs/fees

$1299 & under

Los Cabos
Royal Decameron Los Cabos 4★
Dec 31
$1059 + $404 txs/fees

Cayo Santa Maria
Warwick Cayo Santa Maria 4 1/2★
Feb 6, 13
$1099 + $332 txs/fees

Huatulco
Las Brisas Huatulco 4★
Jan 12, 19
$1199 + $382 txs/fees

Cayo Santa Maria
IBEROSTAR Ensenachos 5★
Best Deal Park Suite Room
Feb 20, 27, Mar 6
$1299 + $332 txs/fees

$1499 & under

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Jr Ste Superior Royal Golden
Feb 10, 24
$1379 + $441 txs/fees

Punta Cana
Luxury Bahia Principe Fantasia Don Pablo Collection 5★
Jan 6, 13, 27
$1469 + $441 txs/fees

Puerto Vallarta
Now Amber Puerto Vallarta 5★
Aura Club Jr Ste Ocean View
Jan 7
$1499 + $398 txs/fees

Riviera Maya
Azul Fives, A Gourmet Inclusive Resort by Karisma 5★
Jan 15, 22
$1499 + $386 txs/fees

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